

THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN DRYDEN'S LITERARY CRITICISM

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WM. E. BOHN

[Reprinted from the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XXII, 1]

THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

From the very first Dryden's critical essays have called forth widely divergent opinions. Written, as many of them were, in the heat of literary conflict, they served during their author's life, on the one hand, as a statement of faith to be expounded and defended, on the other, as a series of vulnerable points of attack. And even since they have held an assured place among English critical works—at first as authoritative judgments and later as historical documents of the very first importance—there has been no orthodox view as to their nature or value. Some historians have always been led by Dryden's popular, rambling style to deny them solid worth; others have found in them a vitality, a genuine insight, worth more than logic. According to Dean Swift they were "merely writ at first for filling, to raise the author's price a shilling;"¹ Doctor Johnson, on the contrary, speaks of them as "the criticism of a poet; not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed; but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction."²

This difference of opinion has perpetuated itself among modern scholars. On the one hand we have Professor

¹ It should be remembered that the relations between Dryden and Swift place the sincerity of this criticism under suspicion.

² *Lives of the Poets*, ed. Arthur Waugh, London, 1896; II, 207.

Saintsbury, in his *History of Criticism*,¹ taking his stand squarely with Doctor Johnson. After giving Dryden an amount of attention which makes him stand out as a giant among his contemporaries, this historian concludes his analysis by placing Dryden's criticism "on that shelf—no capacious one—reserved for the best criticism of the world." And the virtue upon which this estimate is based is superiority to rules, to conventions. Here, at last, thinks Saintsbury, came a critic who could take a book in hand and ask, not, Ought I to like this? but, Do I like it? And if a book had nature, variety, individuality, if it gave delight, he would not be "connoisseured" out of his opinion of it by all the scholars in Christendom. Here was a genuine, unspoiled Englishman hardy enough to establish "the English fashion of criticizing, as Shakespeare did the English fashion of dramatizing—the fashion of aiming at delight, at truth, at justice, at nature, at poetry, and letting the rules take care of themselves."

The opinion which seeks to belittle Dryden's critical power is represented by Delius in his dissertation, *Dryden und Shakespeare*.² Here Dryden is represented as caught in the meshes of contemporary doctrine. The dictum that his appreciation of Shakespeare was merely *phrasenhaft* is softened only by the statement that an adequate recognition of the great Elizabethan was contrary to his very nature and would have interfered seriously with the development of his genius.

Such a diversity of conclusions suggests that we are here dealing with extremely complex material. A first reading of Dryden's criticism is liable to leave one in utter confusion. On one page he seems to rise almost to the level of

¹ Edinburgh and London, 1902; II, 371-89.

² *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*, vol. IV.

the Elizabethans ; on another he falls into a cool and logical classicism. At one moment he defends the heroic drama ; at another he attacks it with his sharpest invective. Often he gives eloquent expression to his love for Shakespeare ; but more than once he falls into petty carping at his great predecessor's faults. The chief difficulty presented by this mass of contrary opinions lies in the fact that it refuses to arrange itself under any simple principle of development. If, for example, Dryden's early critical works exhibited a spirit approximating that of the Elizabethans, and his later ones, a love of classical logicity and orderliness, one could very easily, even on a first reading, make his conflicting views harmonize with a general theory as to his intellectual development. But no such simple principle can possibly bring our author's conflicting opinions into orderly succession. His admiration for Shakespeare, for example, appears at the beginning of his career, near the middle of it, and again at the end.¹ It is only natural that such an incongruous and apparently disordered mass of material as we have here to deal with, should have called forth the most widely divergent opinions.

It would be strange if the problem presented by this material had not attracted serious historians with method adequate to the placing of their author in his intellectual *milieu*. And this task has actually been attempted, with varying degrees of success, by several scholars. The first of these to demand attention, though his work came last in point of time, is W. P. Ker. In his introduction to his admirable edition of Dryden's essays² this editor has done much to show in just what form the various literary

¹ Cf. Margaret Sherwood : *Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Practice* ; Yale Studies in English, 1898 ; pp. 27-31.

² *Essays of John Dryden*, Oxford, 1900.

problems presented themselves to Dryden for solution. But retaining throughout his judicial character of editor, he does not propose any general theory as to the course of our author's critical development.

In the two works which remain to be mentioned, determined attempts have been made to trace some order in the apparent confusion of Dryden's opinions and to explain historically the outlines under which the heterogeneous mass of his theory seems to arrange itself. The first of these is *Drydens Theorie des Dramas*¹ by Felix Bobertag. This author takes Dryden's criticism in the lump and analyses it under the impression that it is, for practical purposes, a well defined system. This system, it seems to him, was roughly sketched in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and filled out in the other essays. In one passage Bobertag does suggest that Dryden's critical development falls into two periods, one represented by the *Essay*, and the other by the preface to *Troilus and Cressida*: but this notion is left undeveloped. The great underlying principle of all Dryden's criticism Bobertag finds in a passage of the preface to *Troilus and Cressida* in which the poet is compared with a wrestler: Dryden here maintains that, as is the case with the wrestler, the poet's "inborn vehemence and force of spirit will only run him out of breath the sooner, if it be not supported by the help of art." And, according to Bobertag, this balance of importance between "force of spirit" and "help of art" is established by the clash of English dramatic tradition and the Gallicized form of Aristotelian criticism. But this twofold division of the influences under which Dryden wrote breaks down in its author's own hands. Forced to add a new element to his scheme, he proceeds to explain that when Dryden cast his first ambitious

¹ Kölbing's *Englische Studien*, iv, 373.

critical work in the form of a dialogue he did so, not only because he could not harmonize English tradition and French rules, but also because he could find in neither of them justification for the literary tastes of the court of Charles II. Our historian analyses with some care the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and the preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, and comes to the conclusion that Dryden's critical scheme of things lacks coherence. This result seems to him to have been inevitable: even a greater genius, in Dryden's position, might have failed to combine satisfactorily the three elements which would necessarily have entered into his work. Bobertag's analysis of the forces which went to the making of Dryden's criticism is of inestimable suggestive value; but what one wants, and seeks here in vain, is a definite tracing of the elements of Dryden's criticism to their sources and an attempt to arrange them in some meaningful order. So far as Bobertag's work is concerned, one is at liberty to regard Dryden's critical theory from beginning to end either as a tangled mass of mutually repellent elements or as a number of elements continuously and evenly intertwined like the strands of a rope.¹

The analysis of our author's critical thinking into its constituents is further developed by Paul Hamelius in his work, *Die Kritik in der englischen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*.² Bobertag discussed two literary traditions,

¹ Parenthetically it should be remarked that Bobertag fails to show in just what feature of Dryden's criticism the influence of the court is discoverable; thus his threefold division of influences remains incomplete. Two of the forces mentioned are purely literary, the other is social, and no attempt is made to show what was the literary, or theoretic, form taken on by the latter, or social, moment.

In the same category with Bobertag's treatise should be placed Laura Johnson Wylie's chapter on Dryden in her volume, *Studies in the Evolution of English Criticism* (1894). Miss Wylie's analysis of Dryden's work is less schematic than Bobertag's, but far more searching and accurate.

² Leipzig, 1897.

the classical and the English, and introduced the court of Charles II as a literary force without attempting to define the nature of its influence. Hamelius, with a much wider reading in English literature and much keener powers of analysis, divides the English critics of Dryden's time into four schools: the neoclassic, the rationalistic, the romantic, and the moralistic.¹ And among the representatives of these four schools he represents Dryden as the great compromiser. It was not until the eighteenth century that English criticism became crystallized; the seventeenth century was a time of preparation. Amidst the confused moving and shaping of things it is but natural that Dryden, a man of marvellously versatile and comprehensive mind, should have embodied in his work all the elements that went to make up the national criticism of his period. This is sufficient to account for all his evident inconsistencies. In the words of Hamelius, "*Der ausserordentliche Wechsel in seinen Ansichten muss teilweise daraus erklärt werden, dass er weder in seiner eigenen Geistesanlage, noch im Geschmacke seiner Zeit eine feste Richtschnur hatte, so dass er sich von persöhnlichen und parteiischen Neigungen, sowie von dem Wunsche, das Wohlwollen adeliger Herren zu erwerben, oder einen verhassten Gegner zu verspotten, leiten liess.*"²

This examination of Dryden's critical theory is the most satisfactory that I have come upon. Three of the critical systems described,—all except that designated as moralistic,—contributed important elements to his work. And it is to be noticed especially that Hamelius connected the influence of the court very definitely with the theory of the heroic drama and its accompanying lack of appreciation for Shakespeare. Here we have, it must be confessed, the

¹ We owe to Hamelius a careful distinction between neoclassicism and English rationalism.

² P. 63.

main features of Dryden's criticism clearly defined. But when we come to search for a principle of order among these antagonistic elements, the result is negative. Bobertag, apparently, never conceived the possibility of such a principle: Hamelius did conceive the notion of its possibility, but, having searched for, and failed to find, the principle, he denies its existence. After stating that Dryden belongs to no critical school, he continues: "Er gehört vielmehr nach einander zu allen, da er alle der Reihe nach bekämpft und verteidigt. Umsonst haben wir versucht einen regelmässigen Uebergang von einer zur anderen wahrzunehmen: es gibt weder einen historischen, noch einen logischen Zusammenhang zwischen seinen Ansichten."¹

The results achieved by the authors whose works we have reviewed may be summed up as follows: certain of them, each paying almost exclusive attention to some one feature of Dryden's critical work, have arrived at radically variant conclusions as to the value and significance of his contribution to critical literature; others, working more fundamentally, have analysed his theory into its several elements, and have connected these with the general tendencies of the life and thought of the seventeenth century. It is the purpose of the present study to take up the discussion of Dryden's criticism where these latter have laid it down.

II.

The natural point of departure for the following discussion is furnished by the statement of Hamelius that there is to be found neither a historical nor a logical connection between Dryden's various contradictory views on questions of literary theory. It is true, as I have already had occasion

¹ P. 63.

to remark, that Dryden's criticism, taken in the mass, is so heterogeneous that it is easy to understand how one might come to conclude that there is no connecting thread running through it. The reasons for this apparent illogicality are not far to seek: one has merely to consider Dryden's character, the nature of the period in which he lived, and his relations with the controlling spirits of this period. Dryden was a man of the world, preëminently endowed with a genius for being "all things to all men." In the scientific and philosophical circles of the Royal Society, among the wits of the coffee-house, with the lords and ladies of the court, in correspondence with the most learned and highest placed in the land, everywhere and in all manners of discourse, his fine intellectual urbanity won its way. In politics, philosophy, and art, as well as in religion, he seemed predestined by nature to become a supreme conformist.

For a man of this type the second half of the seventeenth century was, from one point of view, peculiarly dangerous: its entire atmosphere seemed calculated to jeopardize his intellectual integrity. Of one feature of his situation Dryden was himself painfully conscious; in the prologue to *Aureng-zebe* he wrote:

"Let him retire, between two ages cast,
The first of this, the hindmost of the last."

He was drawn one way by the age of romanticism, another, by the age of reason. His early associations and natural inclinations assimilated him to the Elizabethans; the associations of his later life drew him toward the classicists. But his intellectual life was complicated even more by the fact that in his day, in literature as well as in politics and religion, numerous factions were battling for the supremacy. Controversialist tho he was, Dryden was exactly the sort of man to see things from all angles, to detect, and sympa-

thize with, a certain amount of truth in the contentions of each of the contending parties.

Under certain conceivable circumstances, it is true, we might imagine even a man like Dryden, wide-minded and readily moulded, living, even in times of greatest unrest, an even and regular intellectual life. Bobertag ventures the opinion that if Lessing had achieved a literary and social success comparable with Dryden's, he would not have remained the implacable reformer that we know him. On the other hand, we can figure to ourselves what would have been the result had Dryden been born into a world which could have given him a single, simple ideal, and then, laboring always in one direction, had never had occasion to change his allegiance; no doubt he would, under these circumstances, have escaped the chief part of the blame heaped upon him by some of his biographers.¹ Even supposing him successful and popular, had success been permanent, one can imagine his development quite different from what it actually was. Imagine him, for example, like Congreve, above the necessity of writing for a living, or, like Addison, always the poet of a strong and popular party; under such circumstances, again, his evolution would have been evenly logical, and the inconsistencies of his theory would not have become puzzles for modern historians.

But the course of Dryden's life was diametrically opposed to all that we have been imagining. Not only did this versatile poet live at a time when the intellectual, religious, and political worlds were divided by sharply contesting factions, but within the forty years of his activity he past thro three crises, from each of which a new faction

¹ Suppose, for example, that he had been a young man at the beginning, instead of at the end, of the Puritan revolution: might not his career have resembled that of Milton?

emerged victorious with new policies and new creeds. The expression "past thro" I use deliberately. Dryden was not in a position to stand aloof and watch untroubled the conflict of parties and opinions. Except during the last ten years of his life and for a short period between 1675 and 1680, he felt obliged to place himself in the service of whatever party happened to be in power. And he rendered no half-hearted service. With his urbanity, his genius for quick sympathy and ready conformity, when once he had adopted the cause of a party or sect, that party or sect became a part of himself; he let by-gones be by-gones, loved those he had formerly hated and hated those he had formerly loved. It is easy to understand how a man like this, writing under his particular circumstances, came to produce criticism too diverse in character to exhibit any easily discovered principle of development.

But even if Dryden's environment was too unstable, and his adjustment to that environment too immediate, to permit a simple and logical development of his critical theory, the statement of Hamelius that his critical works exhibit no principle of growth, still appears, *a priori*, extremely improbable. The honestly expressed opinions of a really great man would naturally be organically connected. We are to infer, then, from the statement of Hamelius, either that Dryden's views were falsified, so tampered with in their expression that they were torn from their natural relations, or that his intellectual life was so weak as not to be able to organize and vitalize them in the first place. The truth of this statement would, therefore, imply either dishonesty or utter shallowness in Dryden's critical works. Both of these implications are inconsistent with a true reading of Dryden's character. It would be impossible to over-emphasize the fact that Dryden was no mere turn-coat. Biographers who have written him down as such have not

taken the trouble to follow the subtle workings of his mind. With him changes are never sudden, or schematic and doctrinaire, as they would have been if deliberately entered upon. This is especially noticeable in the development of his critical theory : a new tendency appears first, perhaps, in a chance phrase ; in the next essay it may have grown into a paragraph, and later it may become the inspiring theory of an entire work or series of works. His environment, we have seen, was constantly changing : if he changed with it, it was not because he was dishonest, but because his urbanity was merely the social expression of a versatile intellect which made it easy, even natural, for him to adapt himself to any belief or policy. This he did, inwardly, with a thoro, largely unconscious, assimilation of the new view, and outwardly, with a naïve frankness which, with a sympathetic student, will go far to atone for lack of consistency. Because his changes were genuine it never occurred to him to resort to the subterfuges employed by the dishonest and insincere. It would be difficult indeed to suppose that there is discernible no law of development connecting the various utterances of a man of this sort.

The following study is an attempt to prove that belief in such a law of development has a solid basis in fact. I shall try to show, first, that Dryden's literary criticism, far from being an inchoate mass of unrelated opinions, divides itself into five clearly marked periods ; and, second, that in each of these periods Dryden wrote just the sort of criticism one would expect from a man of his type in his particular environment. I shall try to characterize the criticism of each period and indicate its relations, on the one hand, to our author's general literary output, and, on the other, to the main factors which conditioned his external life. The discussion, therefore, divides itself into five parts corresponding to the five periods of Dryden's critical activity.

THE FIRST PERIOD.

The first period of Dryden's critical development includes the essays written before the close of the year 1665. Up to this time Dryden is still young; he has not achieved any notable success, has not become the literary representative of any party. Hence he has not settled upon any theoretic scheme of things. Naturally, then, the criticism of this period is not dominated by one idea; its general spirit is tentative. Dryden is still free to develop and express all the feelings of a young poet's mind. Among these the most characteristic is enthusiasm for great literature, especially for the drama of the Elizabethans. Hence tho this period presents no system, it is, in a sense, characterized by a free utterance of the romantic spirit.

Dryden's first important piece of criticism was the epistle dedicatory to *The Rival Ladies* (1664). In this essay Dryden appears, first of all, as the sturdy Englishman. The English is a noble language, and in his play he has endeavored to distinguish it from "the tongue of pedants and that of affected travelers." Occasionally he takes a fling at the French; what the English admit of theirs is but "the basest of their men, the extravagances of their fashions, and the frippery of their merchandise." It is here that we find, in its first form, the celebrated eulogy of Shakespeare: in the very act of blaming him for the introduction of blank verse Dryden speaks of his great predecessor as the one "who, with some errors not to be avoided in that age, had undoubtedly a larger soul of poesy than ever any other of our nation." On the other hand Dryden exhibits some traits of the rationalist. He would like a "more certain measure" of the English tongue, "as they have in France, where they have an academy erected for that purpose."¹

¹ I, 5. All references without titles are to Ker's edition of the essays.

One of the great advantages of rime is that it "bounds and circumscribes the fancy. For imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that like an high-ranging spaniel, it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment."¹ There is also to be found in this essay an incipient tendency in the direction of the heroic drama, which, with its rimed verse, its artificial standards of morality, and its glorification of the *noblesse*, is to become the characteristic literary entertainment of the court of Charles II.² First Dryden defends rime, taking the ground that it is not really a new form among the English. And then he puts the question: "But supposing our countrymen had not received this writing till of late; shall we oppose ourselves to the most polisht and civilized nations of Europe?"³ But it is when he takes up the consideration of the more essential features of the drama that Dryden sounds the real note of the heroic theory: "But as the best medicines may lose their virtues by being ill applied, so is it with verse, if a fit subject be not chosen for it. Neither must the argument alone, but the characters and persons be great and noble."⁴ This epistle, then, is a notable collection of apparently contrary opinions: love of the native English, respect for the most polisht nations of Europe, praise of the romantic plays of Shakespeare, and defense of neoclassic rime all go hand in hand.

But the characteristic piece of criticism of this period is the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1665). In his dedication, written in 1668 when the *Essay* was published, Dryden makes the following apology: "I confess I find many things

¹ I, 8.

² Though the comedy of manners flourished at this period, it did not reach its height until later.

³ I, 6.

⁴ I, 8. The significance of this passage was pointed out by George Stuart Collins; cf. his dissertation, *John Dryden, His Dramatic Theory and Praxis*, Leipzig, 1892, p. 8.

in this discourse which I do not now approve; my judgment being a little altered since the writing of it; but whether for the better or worse, I know not: neither indeed is it much material in an essay where all I have said is problematical."¹ But he begins his note to the reader: "The drift of the ensuing discourse was chiefly to vindicate the honor of our English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them."² I think any reader will agree that Eugenius and Neander, the champions of the English drama in this battle of critics, are the favorites of the master of ceremonies: they seem to wield their weapons with an air of triumph. Therefore the *Essay* indicates with more certainty than its form would seem to promise the theories and purposes of its author.

The *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* is, as has been indicated above, in dialog form. Eugenius, Crites, Lisideius, and Neander, seeking in an excursion on the Thames to calm the feelings induced by a naval battle between the English and the Dutch, fall to talk of literature, and especially of the relative merits of ancient and modern drama. Since neither Aristotle nor Horace has given a definition of a play, Lisideius, being importuned, suggests one which is to serve as a basis for the discussion: a play "ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humors, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind."³

Eugenius, responding on behalf of the moderns to an attack by Crites, vigorously defends the unorthodox English manner of plotting: the plots of the ancients, he maintains, "are built after the Italian mode of houses; you see through them all at once: the characters are indeed imitations of nature, but so narrow, as if they imitated only an eye or an

¹ I, 23.² I, 27.³ I, 36.

hand, and did not dare to venture on the lines of a face, or the proportion of a body.”¹ That is, measured by the standard of our definition—A play “ought to be a just and lively image of nature”—the plays of the Greeks fall short. The hardihood of Eugenius advances even to an attack on the unities: the rule as to the unity of place is not to be found in Aristotle or Horace; the unity of time is not always preserved by Terence; the ancients sometimes committed absurdities in attempting to observe these rules. Two of the unities, then, lack the support both of the highest authority and of esthetic judgment.

Neander, defending the English as against the French, begins by granting that the French contrive plots more regularly than his countrymen, and observe the laws of comedy and the decorum of the stage with more exactitude. And yet he is of the opinion that neither English faults nor French virtues are sufficient to give his opponent any advantage: “For the lively imitation of nature being in the definition of a play, those which best fulfil that law ought to be superior to others. ’Tis true, those beauties of the French poesy are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not; they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man, because not animated with the soul of poesy, which is the imitation of humor and passions.”² Thus the word “lively” in the definition is made to furnish the legal defence of romanticism. Continuing in his heterodoxy, Neander next takes up the cause of English tragi-comedy: “A scene of mirth, mixed with tragedy, has the same effect upon us which our music has betwixt the acts; and that we find a relief to us from the best plots and language of the stage, if the discourses have been long. I . . . cannot but conclude, to the honor

¹ I, 47.² I, 68.

of our nation, that we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage, than was ever known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragi-comedy."¹ Continuing in the same strain Neander finds the rich variety of English plots superior to the barrenness of the French. The evident foundation of the argument is the revolutionary doctrine that plays are good according to the amount of pleasure they give; and the various types are judged by the actual experience of the spectator. The mirror of nature, rather than conventional standards, contends Neander, should give law to the drama: "It is unnatural for anyone in a gust of passion to speak long together,"² therefore the French way of putting long speeches into the mouths of the actors is not to be defended.

In the following passage Neander makes a determined attack on the problem of romanticism: "I dare boldly affirm these two things of the English drama:—First, that we have many plays of ours as regular as any of theirs (referring to the French), and which, besides, have more variety of plot and characters; and Secondly, that in the most irregular plays of Shakespeare or Fletcher . . . there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing, than there is in any of the French."³ Dryden's esthetic is not deep enough to justify the form of the English drama, but in the "masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing" he is attempting to discover a new critical principle which will account for the charm which he feels. It is in this same passage that Neander speaks that famous eulogy of Shakespeare: "He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not

¹ I, 70.² I, 72.³ I, 78.

laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too.”¹ A little farther on, speaking of Ben Jonson, he continues: “If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.”² Here we have in 1665 the main idea of the great parallel between Homer and Virgil which is to be found in the preface to the *Fables*, written in 1700; here it is abundance of wit, luxuriance of the creative faculty, that is brought in to justify a feeling that runs directly counter to the conclusions of formal criticism. The *Essay* closes with an elaborate defense of riming plays; which, like the dedication of *The Rival Ladies*, goes to show that Dryden is feeling his way toward the heroic ideal.

But as a whole this work, in its method and spirit, in the underlying feeling of its every part, shows our author in the character of an investigator of the materials of literary criticism. It is to the period of its composition that he referred in his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1692), address to Charles, Earl of Dorset and Middlesex: “When I was myself in the rudiments of my poetry, without name or reputation in the world, having rather the ambition of a writer than the skill; when I was drawing the outline of an art, without any living master to instruct me in it; an art which had been better praised than studied in England, . . . when thus, as I may say, before the use of the loadstone, or knowledge of the compass, I was sailing in a vast ocean, without any other help than the pole-star of the ancients, and the rules of the French stage among the moderns; . . . yet even then, I had the presumption to

¹ I, 79.² I, 82.

dedicate to your lordship: a very unfinished piece, I must confess, and which can only be excused by the little experience of the author, and the modesty of the title *An Essay*.”¹ To a young author of unsettled opinions and inquiring mind the intellectual atmosphere of the moment was not unfavorable. In 1660 Dryden wrote an epistle to an archeological work by Walter Charlton in which he spoke of the subjection to Aristotle as “the longest tyranny that ever swayed.” This was decidedly a period of scepticism, a time when old creeds would have to undergo renewed examination. The whole spirit, scientific and philosophical, of the period which coincided with Dryden’s young manhood tended to reinforce the conditions implied in his own description of the circumstances which conditioned his early critical work.

The first of these conditions was the lack in England of a definite critical standard. Ben Jonson had given vogue to the English neoclassic movement, but the Restoration men of letters looked to France for their theory. And in France, during the great discussions of the early part of the period of Louis XIV, all that the most daring moderns had been able to do was to adapt the dicta of the schools to the demands of the French stage. French classicism, merely a thoro-going rationalism of the French type fathered upon Aristotle, had decreed that the three unities, with their accompanying conventions, constituted a code from which there was no appeal. Plays written according to the law were symmetrical, restrained, intelligible, and therefore beautiful; those fashioned without due regard for the law, even though they gave pleasure, were unintelligible, and therefore monstrous. Now this theory, best formulated in France by Boileau, was already beginning to dominate England when Dryden began his critical labors. Modified by the

¹2, 16.

English genius, especially by English rationalistic philosophy,¹ it was destined to obtain, in the eighteenth century, almost complete control of English thinking on the subject of art. Naturally this philosophy could make nothing of the great Elizabethans; during Dryden's youth and early manhood Shakespeare was falling more and more under the ban of the intellectuals.

Into the arena where the English literary tradition was giving way before the advance of this neoclassicism came, then, the young poet, Dryden. In the essays which we have just examined we have him, still in the first flush of youth, boldly taking his stand upon his literary instincts. In spite of the dicta of the schools he feels the spell of great literature and is suspicious of the critical theory which cannot make room for it. Without the support of precedent or the aid of adequate method, but with a superb enthusiasm, he is attempting to give theoretic justification to what his feelings recognize as beautiful. The formal results of his attempt are a partial clearing away of the rubbish heaped upon Aristotle, a resort to the historical method,² a widening of the theory of imitation, and a determined attempt to judge literature with reference to its social function.

In 1667 when our author revived *The Wild Gallant* he introduced it with a prolog in which he compared his own

¹ This expression I use rather loosely to designate English sensationalism. This kind of materialistic rationalism is represented by the tendency to hold art down to the common-sense standards of ordinary life.

² Of course I do not mean to imply that Dryden had a deep, modern sense of historical development of the arts. Now and then, when it suited his occasions, he explained the difference between Greek and Roman art, between French and English, or between ancient and modern, by means of references to the social conditions, or peculiarities of taste, of the nations or periods in question. But any systematic application of the historical method of criticism was out of the question.

evolution with that of "some raw squire, by tender mother bred." The innocent squire comes at length to town :

"Where entered by some school-fellow or friend,
He grows to break glass windows in the end ;
His valor, too, which with the watch began,
Proceeds to duels, and he kills his man."

Though Dryden intended this as an account of his education in obscenity, it is capable of a much wider application. He came to London with his fortune and reputation to make ; a Puritan by birth and early associations, he naturally did all in his power to win esteem in Puritan circles ; after the Restoration he continued his efforts more and more successfully with the new court. But in 1665 there was still something of the raw squire about him ; he was endeavoring to strike in with the fancy of town and court, but had as yet not mastered the trick. In 1667, speaking of *The Indian Emperor*, he said : "It is an irregular piece, if compared with many of Corneille's, and, if I may make a judgment of it, written with more flame than art."¹ That is, in 1665, the time of the writing of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden had not settled upon his literary aims ; he had not yet brought himself to defend, and work within the limits of, a definite literary form. And on this account his critical genius was left free to give us during this period judgments and appreciations which alone would mark him as the greatest innovator who has thus far appeared among modern critics.²

¹ Works, ed. Scott and Saintsbury, II, 288.

² Perhaps it is unnecessary to say that I do not attempt to account satisfactorily for the nature of the criticism which Dryden produced during any particular period. The motives which work themselves out in the mind of any great man are naturally complex, and the influences to which Dryden was subject were particularly numerous and varied. I merely attempt to point out the relations of his criticism to certain other features of his life and works.

THE SECOND PERIOD.

The second period of Dryden's critical activity includes the ten years from 1666 to 1675. Gradually, during the middle of the decade between 1661 and 1670, our author improved his situation; beginning as a struggling unknown, he soon became the most popular poet in England, the favorite of court and play-house. The court was given its intellectual tone by sensual noblemen who could find little pleasure in the genuine tragedy which bases itself upon human life and emotions. Adapting his works, half unconsciously, to the taste of these men, under whose influence he lived and upon whose favor he was dependent, Dryden came naturally to devote himself to the heroic play. And his talent for criticism was turned to good account in the exposition and defense of the heroic literary ideal.¹ This led naturally to a rather mechanical conception of poetry, a fervid defense of rime, apologies for extravagance in character-development, and an undervaluing of the work of the Elizabethans.

From the beginning of his life in London Dryden showed his tendency to swim with the current. Miserably poor,² he depended for success on the notice which the efforts of his pen might attract in high places. His career began auspiciously enough. In 1657, when Dryden came up to London, Cromwell was still at the height of his power, and Sir Gil-

¹ Like most critics, Dryden paid little attention to the problems of comedy. In addition to the difficulties presented by the subject his neglect was no doubt prompted by his natural dislike of comedy writing: more than once he lamented the fact that he was forced to this distasteful labor. At any rate it is certain that his comedy is related to his critical theory only so far as it exhibits his general state of mind or throws light on his relations with his public.

² Saintsbury, *Life of Dryden*, English Men of Letters Series, p. 10; Christy, *Memoir of Dryden*, Globe edition of works, p. xx.

bert Pickering, Dryden's cousin, stood high in the Protector's favor. Thus our author got near enough to Cromwell to feel something of the magnetism of his personality. Already a Puritan by birth and training, he naturally threw himself into the glorification of the Puritan hero and his cause. There is no reason to doubt that Dryden's eulogy of Cromwell was a sincere outpouring of the young poet's enthusiasm. But at the very time when this poem was written the political tide began to set in a new direction. Weary of constant unrest, practically all England began to look toward the restoration of the house of Stuart for relief. And it is but natural that our versatile young poet, when his powerful friends began to turn royalists, should be thrilled with the common feeling of exultation at the prospect of a settled government and the glories of a new court. So one is not at all surprised at the tone of the extravagant panegyrics with which he hailed the Restoration.

Dryden's facility in adapting himself to changed circumstances is shown also by the rapidity with which he gained friends among the royalists. Chief among his new intimates was Sir Robert Howard. Immediately after the Restoration Sir Robert had prefixed to a volume of verse an epistle by Dryden, "To my Honored Friend, Sir Robert Howard." In the epistle which served as a dedication of *Annus Mirabilis* (1666) Dryden wrote to Howard: "You have not only been careful of my fortune, which was the effect of your nobleness, but you have been solicitous of my reputation, which is that of your kindness."¹ In 1663 our author married Howard's sister, Lady Elizabeth Howard, and in 1664 the brothers-in-law produced together *The Indian Queen*. All of this goes to show that even at this early period Dryden was, not entirely without success, bending

¹ I, 10.

every effort toward the attainment of recognition among the satellites of the court.

But the evidence of Dryden's easy adaptation to a changed environment would not be complete without some mention of his earlier plays. Almost from the beginning his dramatic as well as his lyric muse was brought into subjection to his conformist tendency. Tho *The Wild Gallant* (1663) was a dismal failure on the stage, the patronage of Lady Castlemain, mistress to the king, infused new life into our author's "condemned and dying muse."¹ Referring to this play Dryden wrote: "Yet it was received at court; and was more than once the divertisement of his majesty, by his own command; but I have more modesty than to ascribe that to my merit, which was his particular act of grace."² In *The Rival Ladies* (1664) and *The Indian Emperor* (1665) Dryden made his first attempts in the direction of the heroic. And that these attempts were conscious efforts to please the king appears from a number of Dryden's own statements. In the dedication of *The Indian Emperor* he wrote: "The favor which heroic plays have lately found upon our theaters has been wholly derived to them from the countenance and approbation they received at court. The most eminent persons for wit and honor in the royal circle having so owned them, that they have judged no way so fit as verse to entertain a noble audience, or express a noble passion."³ In his epistle dedicatory to *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, written in 1668 when the *Essay* was published, he thus supported his argument in favor of rime: "The court, which is the best and surest judge of writing, has generally allowed of verse; and in the town it has found favorers of

¹ Cf. Dryden's poem, *To the Lady Castlemain*.

² Preface to *The Wild Gallant*, Scott-Saintsbury, vol. II, 27.

³ Scott-Saintsbury, II, 285.

wit and quality.”¹ Dryden was poor, dependent upon his pen for a livelihood; it is but natural that he should have fallen in with the mode favored by those whose approbation meant success.

Even during his first period, then, Dryden was doing his utmost to gain his way among the great ones of the court. But the court was not yet sure of its own tastes; the norm of the heroic play had not yet been worked out. Dryden was, as yet, unable to command his talents to the best advantage, to cast them into the required mold, to make them respond quickly and faultlessly to the demands made upon them; hence his work was not, during this early period, especially distinguished. It was on account of these facts that he worked for full five years without a settled literary system, and thus was left free to give us at the beginning of his career criticism so remarkable for fresh enthusiasm and unconventionality. But early in the second period our author's efforts to attain distinction began to tell in the most decisive manner. Already allied by marriage to a noble family, he was soon established as a successful playwright. About the year 1667 he entered upon a contract with the King's Theater: in return for three plays a year he was to receive a share and a quarter of the profits of the theater. For some years, it appears, his profits from this source amounted to two or three hundred pounds annually. In 1670 he was appointed by the king to the posts of Poet-laureate and Historiographer Royal with a salary of two hundred pounds a year and arrears amounting to four hundred pounds.

Besides this official recognition evidences of favor with the court are abundant. *Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen* (1667) Charles graced with the title of “his play.”² From numerous

¹ I, 24.

² Scott-Saintsbury, II, 417.

suggestions in the prefaces, dedications, etc., one gathers that the king took a strong interest in Dryden's work, discussed plans with him, and honored him with advice. As to our author's social position in general, Scott's statement seems to be quite within the limits of fact: "Whether we judge of the rank which Dryden held in society by the splendor of his titled and powerful friends, or by his connections among men of genius, we must consider him as occupying at this time, as high a station in the foremost circle as literary reputation could gain for its owner. Independent of the notice with which he was honored by Charles himself, the poet numbered among his friends most of the distinguished nobility."¹ Evidence of Dryden's subservience to the court is abundant. *Tyrannic Love* was written at the request of "some persons of honor;"² *Amboyna* was merely a piece of political service. In *The Indian Emperor* there occur numerous discussions of royal authority, all of which turn in favor of absolutism; in *The Conquest of Granada*, after Almanzor has been represented as a being quite apart from ordinary flesh and blood he becomes immediately comprehensible when it is explained that he is of royal lineage. That the heroic drama was developed in response to the expressed taste of Charles II has already been made evident. In the *Defense of the Epilog* (1672) Dryden referred not only the heroic drama but the entire atmosphere of the period, all its tastes and enthusiasms, to the courtly influence.³ And in *The Defense of an Essay*

¹ *Ibid.*, I, 96.

² *Ibid.*, III, 376.

³ "Now, if they ask me whence it is that our conversation is so much refined? I must freely, and without flattery, ascribe it to the court; and, in it, particularly to the King, whose example gives a law to it. His own misfortunes, and the nation's, afforded an opportunity, which is rarely allowed to sovereign princes, I mean of traveling, and being conversant in the most polished courts of Europe; and, thereby, of cultivating a spirit which was formed by nature to receive the impressions of a gallant and generous education. At his return, he found a nation lost as much in

of *Dramatic Poesy* he makes a frank confession of personal servitude: "For I confess my chief endeavors are to delight the age in which I live."¹

barbarism as in rebellion; and, as the excellency of his nature forgave the one, so the excellency of his manners reformed the other. The desire of imitating so great a pattern first awakened the dull and heavy spirits of the English from their natural reservedness; loosened them from their stiff forms of conversation, and made them easy and pliant to each other in discourse. Thus, insensibly, our way of living became more free; and the fire of English wit, which was before stifled under a constrained, melancholy way of breeding, began first to display its force, by mixing the solidity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbors. This being granted to be true, it would be a wonder if the poets, whose work is imitation, should be the only persons in three kingdoms who should not receive the advantage of it; or, if they should not more easily imitate the wit and conversation of the present age than of the past." I, 176.

In order to appreciate the full significance of this passage one should place in contrast to it the epilog written by Dryden just before his death for a presentation of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Pilgrim* for his benefit. Attempting to defend the stage against Jeremy Collier's attack Dryden wrote on this occasion:

"But sure a banished court, with lewdness fraught,
The seeds of open vice returning brought.

.
The poets, who must live by courts or starve,
Were proud, so good a government to serve;
And, mixing with buffons and pimps profane,
Tainted the stage for some small snip of gain."

¹I, 116. Of course the important point is, not that Dryden was connected with a court, but that he was connected with a court which was, in large measure, cut off from the national life. Compare his situation, for example, with that of Shakespeare or Racine. The case of the first of these, it is true, differs from that of Dryden in that his effort was partially directed toward entertaining the promiscuous crowd of Londoners who flocked to his theater. But there is abundant evidence to show that he took account of the aristocratic part of his audience, and his ardent royalism crops out in nearly everyone of his plays. In Queen Elizabeth's time, however, the best elements in the nation were rallying about the throne; consequently Shakespeare's devotion to the court and things courtly did not lead him outside the main interests of English national life. Tho the relations of Racine with the court of Louis XIV were very different from those of

Fortunately enough Dryden himself noticed the relation between his criticism and the society he kept. Having been attacked, just when or how, is not clear, by the old-fashioned Elizabethans and by the more new-fashioned, but not less straight-laced, classicists he answered by placing himself among the court wits and saying, in substance, These dull fellows never could understand us.¹ So far as this period is concerned, then, it is merely necessary to follow up this clue which Dryden himself has given us. What was the

Shakespeare with the court of Elizabeth, still, thro them, Racine was, like his great English predecessor, kept in vital touch with the life and ideals of his nation. The continuing popularity of his plays proves that they really represent French thought and feeling.

Dryden's position differed from that of Shakespeare and Racine in that for him devotion to the court meant separation from the best traditions and life of his nation. During the time when he was writing his heroic plays the court of Charles II was rapidly alienating, not only the citizen class, but even many among those of noble blood who had at first hailed it with enthusiasm. Its ideals were so largely exotic that plays written to suit its taste could hardly represent the life of England. Hence when one says that the heroic play grew up as a result of the influence of the court of Charles II, his position is not invalidated by the remark that plays of a very different type have been produced under the influence of other courts.

¹The passage referred to occurs in the dedication of *The Assignment* (1673), addressed to Sir Charles Sedley, the most brilliant and dissolute among the wits of the court: "For this reason, I have often laughed at the ignorant and ridiculous descriptions which some pedants have given of the wits, as they are pleased to call them; which are a generation of men unknown to them, as the people of Tartary, or the Terra Australis, are to us. And therefore, as we draw giants and anthropophagi in those vacancies of our maps, where we have not traveled to discover better; so those wretches paint lewdness, atheism, folly, ill-reasoning, and all manner of extravagances amongst us, for want of understanding what we are . . . I am ridiculously enough, accused of being a contemner of universities; that is, in other words, an enemy of learning; without the foundation of which, I am sure, no man can pretend to be a poet. And if this be not enough, I am made a detractor of my predecessors, whom I confess to have been my masters in the art." Scott-Saintsbury, iv, 373.

For the real characters of Sedley and his associates see Scott-Saintsbury, iv, 373; and Beljame, *Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres*, pp. 5, 6.

nature of the poems, plays and literary criticism produced by this chief purveyor of literature to a witty court? The first poem of Dryden's second period was *Annus Mirabilis* (1666), an epic narrative of the two great events of the year 1666, the war against the Dutch and the burning of London. Like the more important of Dryden's earlier poems this epic is a tribute to royalty; the Dutch war and the great fire worked together for the glory of Charles II and the Duke of York. But perhaps the work is most interesting from the point of view of technical execution. It is evident that there could be in it little of genuine poetic inspiration; Dryden has selected the subjects which are of public interest and which offer opportunity to serve his master; all his talent is bent to the task of making a beautiful poem out of this unpromising material. In the preface he explains the nature of wit and describes all the processes of poetry-making: and in the poem he exemplifies his theories—he decorates his thoughts with appropriate ornaments, clothes them in sounding terms. And, it must be confessed, especially in the description of the fire, he succeeds to a remarkable degree.

The letter which serves as a preface to *Annus Mirabilis*, evidently an exposition of the methods employed in the writing of the poem, exemplifies, in its main features, the neoclassic manner of thought which is coming into vogue. There is to be found here nothing of the revolutionist. Dryden confesses specifically that in this poem Virgil has been his master; and when one remembers all that Virgil was made to stand for among the neoclassicists this profession prepares him to expect a cut-and-dried poetic theory. The following sentences on the nature of poetry and wit are typical; "The composition of all poems is, or ought to be, of wit; and wit in the poet, or *wit writing*, . . . is no other than the faculty of imagination in the writer,

which, like a nimble spaniel, beats over and ranges through the field of memory, till it springs the quarry it hunted after. . . . *Wit written* is that which is well defined, the happy result of thought, or product of imagination.”¹ This is evidently the beginning of the common-sense, mechanical notion of poetry the development of which we shall have to describe when we reach the discussion of Dryden’s work during the decade between 1680 and 1689. Could anything more resemble a passage from a treatise on *The Complete Art of Poetry* than does the following? “So then the first happiness of the poet’s imagination is properly invention, or finding of the thought; the second is fancy, or the variation, deriving, or molding of that thought, as the judgment represents it proper to the subject; the third is elocution, or the act of clothing and adorning that thought, so found and varied, in apt, significant, and sounding words.”²

It is to be taken into account that this is but a short epistle, making few pretensions. But it seems to me that if, at the time of its writing, Dryden had been in the state of mind which inspired the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, or even the little preface to *The Rival Ladies*, he would have written something far different. Ker notices that in this letter Dryden admires in the works of Ovid and Virgil chiefly their separate pieces of description. Throughout the entire discussion, one might add, he seems to be thinking of ornaments spread over a work of literature rather than of organic beauties that shine out from within; there is no reference here, as there was in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, to the difference between a man and a statue. The blessed uncertainty and spontaneity of the earlier period have given way to a cold scholasticism.

The first drama of this period, *Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen* (1667), was introduced with the following prolog:

¹ I, 14.

² I, 15.

I.

"He who writ this, not without pains and thought,
From French and English theaters has brought
The exactest rules by which a play is wrought.

II.

"The Unities of Action, Place, and Time;
The scenes unbroken; and the mingled chime
Of Jonson's humor with Corneille's rime.

III.

"But while dead colors he with care did lay,
He fears his *wit*, or *plot*, he did not weigh,
Which are the *living beauties* of a play."

This remarkable prolog is in the nature of a confession of scepticism. Dryden is saying to his masters: Here is your play; I have fixed it up to suit your taste, but as for me, I am far from being satisfied with it; I demand something more than regularity and ornamentation. As we shall see, the last stanza of this prolog, with a corresponding passage in the preface to *Secret Love*, stands quite alone among the critical works of Dryden's second period. As the anxiety expressed in the prolog might lead one to expect, there is to be found in *Secret Love* more of living beauty than in any other play of this period. In the serious parts there is even less of the heroic than in *The Indian Emperor*, and some of the comic parts are superb. That is to say, we have here in Dryden's actual literary work as well as in his theory, a slight reaction, a deviation from his general tendency.

In 1668, with the second edition of *The Indian Emperor*, Dryden published *A Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, "being an Answer to the Preface of *The Great Favorite*, or *the Duke of Lerma*." This essay divides itself into two parts, the first, a defense of rime, the second, a defense of

the unities. In his masterly introduction Dryden throws the burden of proof on his opponent, Sir Robert Howard, by representing himself as the humble champion of Aristotle, Horace, and "all poets both ancient and modern." Howard has based his argument on the Aristotelian doctrine of imitation. Dryden admits the principle—" 'Tis true that to imitate well is the poet's work"—but to support rime, which cannot be defended on that basis, he attempts to define the purpose of poetry: "To affect the soul, and excite the passions, and, above all, to move admiration (which is the delight of serious plays) a bare imitation will not serve."¹ But later he has to meet Howard's statement that, "In the difference of tragedy, comedy, and farce itself there can be no determination but by taste," and he answers: "Were there neither judge, taste, nor opinion in the world, yet they would differ in their natures."² And taking up the real problem of taste, he adds: "To please the people ought to be the poet's aim, because plays are made for their delight; but it does not follow that they are always pleased with good plays, or that the plays which please them are always good." In defending rime Dryden insisted upon a literary evaluation which bases itself upon, and expresses in terms of, the social purpose of literature: but now, when it better serves his turn, he insists upon principles like Aristotle's. In passing from one of Howard's points to another he has changed his creed. It would be safe to challenge anyone to gather from this essay Dryden's real opinions as to the moot points of seventeenth century criticism: at one moment the principle of imitation is all-sufficient, at another, it is cast aside; at one moment a play is to be judged by the pleasure it gives, at another, it is to be ranked according to some eternal law. Dryden is here

¹ I, 113.² I, 120.

defending, not a doctrine, but a thing—the rimed play : this courtly form of amusement has been attacked, and in its defence all doctrines are alike to him ; his critical creed changes with the exigencies of controversy. As to the unities, Dryden has merely laid down “some opinions of the ancients and moderns,” together with some of his own. The argument is rather conventional, based, with frequent invocations of the goddess of Reason, on the law of imitation.

The chief significance of this essay lies in the fact that it places Dryden definitely before us as the defender of the reigning modes. Sir Robert Howard, a champion of the old English dramatic traditions, has defended blank verse and utmost liberty in the structure of plots ; Dryden exerts all his skill in the defense of rime and the unities. His authorities are Virgil (mentioned as the only perfect poet), Jonson (“in judgment above all other poets”), the ancients, especially Aristotle and Horace (whom he “will still think as wise as those who so confidently correct them”), and Corneille. This array of authorities alone, taken in connection with the apparent humility with which Dryden is willing to submit to them, would be sufficient to show how complete has been his change of heart since the writing of the *Essay* itself. It is especially noticeable that the thoroughgoing good-sense which gave tone to the dedication of *Annus Mirabilis* has already been perverted. Dryden is here using the logical methods of the rationalist to defend a sort of play as irrational as can be imagined.

The preface to *An Evening's Love, or the Mock Astrologer* (1668) shows how Dryden's conformity and his resulting popularity even thus early began to color his opinion of the Elizabethans. According to his opening statement he originally intended to discuss in this preface the difference between the plays of his age and those of his predecessors on the English stage, and also the improvement of the language

since Fletcher's and Jonson's day : intentions which he is to carry out in *The Defense of the Epilog.* But even tho he has given over for the present the idea of treating systematically the superiority of his own time, the feeling of this superiority is so strong upon him that it will not be smothered. Ben Jonson comes off pretty well : "But Ben Jonson is to be admired for his many excellencies ; and can be taxed with fewer failings than any English poet. I know I have been accused as an enemy of his writings ; but without any other reason than that I do not admire him blindly, and without looking into his imperfections. For why should he alone be exempted from those frailties, from which Homer and Virgil are not free? Or why should there be any *Ipse dixit* in our poetry, any more than in our philosophy? I admire and applaud him where I ought : those who do more, do but value themselves in their admiration of him ; and, by telling you they extol Ben Jonson's way, will insinuate to you that they can practise it. For my part, I declare that I want judgment to imitate him ; and should think it a great impudence in myself to attempt it. To make men appear pleasantly ridiculous on the stage, was, as I have said, his talent ; and in this he needed not the acumen of wit but that of judgment. For the characters and representations of folly are only the effects of observation ; and observation is an effect of judgment."¹ This is merely patronizing, but when he comes to Shakespeare and Fletcher our author assumes quite a different tone : "I think there is no folly so great in any poet of our age, as the superfluity and waste of wit was in some of our predecessors : particularly we may say of Fletcher and of Shakespeare, what was said of Ovid, *in omni ejus ingenio facilius quod rejici, quam quod adjici potest, invenies.* The

¹ I, 138.

contrary of which was true in Virgil and our incomparable Jonson.”¹

In answer to the charge of plagiarism Dryden modestly refers to King Charles, who has lately remarked that he wishes others would steal him such plays as Dryden's: but his real defense is an analysis of the poet's work, in which he proves that the mere outline which an author can steal is but a small part of a play. This analysis is very like the one which we examined in the preface to *Annus Mirabilis*, but its conclusion seems worth quoting: “But in general, the employment of a poet is like that of a curious gunsmith, or watchmaker; the iron or silver is not his own; but they are the least part of that which gives the value: the price lies wholly in the workmanship.”² It would hardly be fair to hold Dryden responsible for all the implications of this mechanical figure; but it is surely significant of his general state of mind.

This preface distinctly foreshadows the *Defense of the Epilog* (1672), with its sharp arraignment of the faults of Shakespeare. That is a significant sentence in which Dryden connects philosophy and poetry: “Or why should there be any *Ipse dixit* in our poetry, any more than in our philosophy?” He has lost faith in the traditions which called forth the enthusiasm of his youth, but, like the English philosophers of his time, he has abundant confidence in the principles and methods of the present.

In the critical works just examined Dryden shows that he has been for some time revolving in his mind the various aspects of the heroic drama, and, as one is thus led to expect, it is in plays of the heroic type that the dramatic activity of the period finally culminates. The first of these is *Tyrannic Love, or the Royal Martyr* (1669). Dryden

¹ I, 139.

² I, 147.

begins his preface to this drama: "I was moved to write this play by many reasons: amongst the others, the commands of some persons of honor, for whom I have a most particular respect, were daily sounding in my ears, that it would be of good example to undertake a poem of this nature. Neither was my own inclination wanting to second their desires."¹ The drama which was thus written at the suggestion of "some persons of honor" presents most of the features of a typical heroic play: a rather colorless heroine of irreproachable character, a fine code of honor, and a warrior who storms against gods and men. In accordance with Dryden's theories it exhibits, also, miracles, guardian angels, and spirits of divers descriptions. But Maximin, the fearless warrior, is villain rather than hero, and in the end the play is an apotheosis of Christian faith rather than of romantic courage.

It is in the two parts of *The Conquest of Granada* (1670) that the English heroic type reaches its culmination. Here we have the all-conquering hero who whistles fortune after him, makes and unmakes kings, single-handed disperses armies, and, quite contrary to Restoration standards, loves with a nice regard for an extremely conventional code of honor. The other chief characters, the villains, merely male and female devils, and the heroine, spotlessly insipid, are mere abstractions. There are no lights or shades; all the actions are either miraculously heroic or unspeakably heinous. It is really a complete order of things that we have before us here; no one acts or talks like a person in the real world, but, under the conditions of this artificial universe, all is consistent. Every character does what is expected of him, and the whole scheme of things makes it possible to carry out a plot which any relation to reality

¹ Scott-Saintsbury, III, 376.

would render impossible. The polished versification merely gives a fitting exterior to this material. But what I wish to emphasize is the fact that this whole make-believe universe is a glorification of royalty and nobility. At this time the king and his court are attempting to maintain their position, especially to assert their supremacy over "the town." Thus it may readily be understood how a stage world in which their superiority over the common herd is a fundamental principle, and throughout which is maintained the elevation of thought and conduct to which they lay claim, is as incense in their nostrils. Nothing else could have been so suitable for the entertaining of "a noble audience."

This period reached its dramatic and critical climaxes in the same volume: with the two parts of *The Conquest of Granada* were published in 1672 an essay *Of Heroic Plays* and the *Defense of the Epilog*. The first of these, Dryden's chief apology for a type of literature to which he devoted some of his most ambitious efforts and for which he was the accepted sponsor, begins in a tone of triumph: "Whether heroic verse ought to be admitted into serious plays, is not now to be disputed: it is already in possession of the stage; and I dare confidently affirm that very few tragedies, in this age, shall be received without it."¹ Then, after repeating an argument for rime which we have already heard in the *Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, he goes on to relate the history of the heroic play: during the time when plays were prohibited in England Sir William Davenant introduced from Italy "examples of moral virtue, writ in verse and performed in recitative music;"² after the Restoration these entertainments developed into heroic plays. But, according to Dryden, Davenant's plays lacked fulness of plot and variety of characters, and something might have

¹ I, 148.² I, 149.

been added to the beauty of the style. Here Dryden begins with becoming modesty, to give an account of what he himself has performed. Whereas Davenant took his image of a heroic poem from the drama, Dryden derived his ideal of a heroic drama from the heroic poem. Therefore, it seemed to our author, he was the first to give epic dignity to the heroic play. The inspiration of our author's innovations, he tells us, came from a passage of Ariosto's :

“ Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto.” ¹

The ministry of gods as well as of disembodied spirits and the performance of deeds of valor by heroes has always been allowed in heroic poetry, and is, therefore, essential to the heroic play.

A detailed account of this essay is unnecessary : it exhibits an exceptional unity of principle. The heroic play in all its attributes is defended on the basis of the theory of idealization : everything is to be heightened ; or, to use Dryden's own figure, we are to fly rather than walk.

At first thought this essay may seem to stand in direct contradiction to the preface of *An Evening's Love*. In the preface of 1671 we saw Dryden the cool champion of moderation ; and now, in 1672, he is defending excesses which seemed ridiculous even to many of his contemporaries. The apparent anomaly becomes intelligible if we remember that in both, as also in the *Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden is defending at once himself and the literary fashions of the day. There is a tone almost domineering in the concluding sentence of the essay *Of Heroic Plays* : “ But I have already swept the stakes ; and, with the good fortune of prosperous gamesters, can be content

¹ I, 150.

to sit quietly; to hear my fortune cursed by some, and my faults arraigned by others, and to suffer both without reply.”¹

In the *Defense of the Epilog*² Dryden avowedly sets out to examine the works of his predecessors on the English stage. A passage from the opening paragraph will serve to show the temper of the entire essay. After explaining that he feels obliged to defend the epilog in which he has taxed “the former writing” Dryden fortifies himself against misinterpretation: “Yet I would so maintain my opinion of the present age, as not to be wanting in my veneration for the past: I would ascribe to dead authors their just praises in those things wherein they have excelled us; and in those wherein we contend with them for the preëminence, I would acknowledge our advantage to the age, and claim

¹ I, 159.

²

Epilog

To the Second Part of the Conquest of Granada (1672).

Following are the essential parts of this epilog:

“They, who have best succeeded on the stage,
Have still conformed their genius to the age.
Thus *Jonson* did mechanic humor show,
When men were dull, and conversation low.
Then, *Comedy* was faultless, but ’twas coarse:
Cobb’s tankard was a jest, and *Otter’s* horse.
And, as their *Comedy*, their love was mean;
Except, by chance, in some one labored scene,
Which must atone for an ill-written play:
They rose, but at their height could seldom stay.
Fame then was cheap, and the first comer sped;
And they have kept it since by being dead.

If *Love* and *Honor* now are higher rais’d
’Tis not the poet but the age is prais’d.
Wit’s now arrived to a more high degree;
Our native language more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those poets writ.”

no victory from our wit. This being what I have proposed to myself, I hope I shall not be thought arrogant when I inquire into their errors. For we live in an age so sceptical, that as it determines little, so it takes nothing from antiquity on trust; and I confess to have no other ambition in this essay, than that poetry may not go backward, when all other arts and sciences are advancing.”¹ And a little later Dryden adds, on the authority of Horace, “that antiquity alone is no plea for the excellency of a poem.” Here again our author brings together philosophy and poetry; the literature of the former age is to be examined sceptically, coldly, in the manner of contemporaneous English philosophy; there are to be no fond enthusiasms here.

Very methodically Dryden goes about his exposition: first he will show that since the age of Shakespeare and Fletcher there has been “an improvement of our wit, language and conversation; or an alteration in them for the better.” Improper words and phrases have been dropped. There is to be found some solecism of speech or notorious flaw in sense in every page of Shakespeare or Fletcher. The times were ignorant wherein they wrote; witness the lameness of their plots; Fletcher understood not correct plotting or the decorum of the stage. “But these absurdities, which those poets committed, may more properly be called the age’s faults than theirs; for, besides the want of education and learning (which was their particular unhappiness), they wanted the benefit of converse.”² Poor Ben Jonson’s linguistic sins are dragged to light till our author grows weary of his task: “And what correctness, after this, can be expected from Shakespeare or from Fletcher, who wanted that learning and care which Jonson had?”

Besides rejecting improper words and phrases, continues

¹ I, 162.

² I, 166.

Dryden, it is obvious that we have admitted many good ones, some of which we wanted, others of which are rather ornamental than necessary. Our tongue has been beautified by Shakespeare, Fletcher, Jonson, Suckling, and Waller. In addition to refinement of speech there has been a refinement of wit: "The wit of the last age was yet more incorrect than their language. Shakespeare, who many times has written better than any poet, in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes, in many places, below the dullest writer of ours, or any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such a height of thought to so low expressions, as he often does. He is the very Janus of poets; he wears almost everywhere two faces; you have scarce begun to admire the one, ere you despise the other."¹ After stating that even Ben Jonson descended to the "most grovelling kind of wit, which we call clenches," Dryden goes on to say: "But, to conclude with what brevity I can, I will only add this, in defence of our present writers, that, if they reach not the excellencies of Ben Jonson (which no age, I am confident, ever shall), yet, at least, they are above that meanness of thought which I have taxed, and which is frequent in him.

"That the wit of this age is more courtly, may easily be proved, by viewing the characters of gentlemen which were written in the last."² And then, after some remarks on Truewit, Mercutio, and Don John: "I have always acknowledged the wit of our predecessors, with all the veneration which becomes me; but, I am sure, their wit was not that of gentlemen; there was ever something that was ill-bred and clownish in it, and which confessed the conversation of the authors."³ And this leads Dryden to the last and

¹ I, 172.² I, 174.³ I, 174.

greatest advantage of the Restoration literature, which proceeds from conversation : through the influence of the court there has been added to the drama a touch of gallantry which was quite impossible to the plain-bred Elizabethans.¹

The essay closes as it began : "To conclude all, let us render to our predecessors what was their due, without confining ourselves to servile imitation of all they writ ; and, without assuming to ourselves the title of better poets, let us ascribe to the gallantry and civility of our age the advantage which we have above them, and to our knowledge of the customs and manner of it the happiness we have to please beyond them." ²

As Professor Hamelius has said,³ this essay marks Dryden as class-conscious. He has married into a noble family and is on familiar terms with the great ; and therefore he represents the tastes of the governing classes. The stage has learned its fine manners from the court, and must be defended against the lower strata of society : "Gentlemen will now be entertained with the follies of each other ; and though they allow Cobb and Tib to speak properly, yet they are not much pleased with their tankard or with their rags.

¹ "In the age wherein those poets lived, there was less of gallantry than in ours ; neither did they keep the best company of theirs. Their fortune has been much like that of Epicurus, in the retirement of his gardens ; to live almost unknown, and to be celebrated after their decease. I cannot find that any of them had been conversant in courts, except Ben Jonson ; and his genius lay not so much that way, as to make an improvement by it. Greatness was not then so easy of access, nor conversation so free as it now is. I cannot, therefore, conceive it any insolence to affirm, that, by the knowledge and pattern of their wit who writ before us, and by the advantage of our own conversation, the discourse and raillery of our comedies excel what has been written by them. And this will be denied by none, but some few old fellows who value themselves on their acquaintance with the *Black Friars* ; who, because they saw their plays, would pretend to the right to judge ours." I, 175.

² I, 177.

³ *Die Kritik in der Englischen Literatur*, p. 37.

And surely their conversation can be no jest to them on the theater, when they could avoid it in the streets.”¹

And just as this courtly literature is to be defended against the lower classes of the present, so it is to be defended against the sturdy, human, romantic English literature of the past. It is noticeable that the *Ipse dixit* that Dryden opposes is not that of the ancients: the theories of Aristotle and Horace crop out on nearly every page. “Some few old fellows who value themselves on their acquaintance with the *Black Friars*”—that is, the champions of the Elizabethans—are his real opponents. He has the spirit of English science and philosophy, he delights in breaking from the past; but it is from the past of Shakespeare and Fletcher that he is taking leave. The magisterial tone of the introduction is in itself extremely significant: in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* Dryden loved Shakespeare: here there is no talk of love; instead we are to have a scientific impartiality. But even this profession is hardly justified by what follows. With the exception of a patronizing apology here and there, the entire essay is a piece of fault-finding. Taking for granted, even, that the criticism is just, for us the important thing is that in 1672 Dryden is disposed to pass the virtues of the great Elizabethans without more than a perfunctory acknowledgment. His praise is for Virgil, Jonson, and, above all, for the playwrights of the Restoration. The present is to Dryden a golden age: The heroic play, the polisht versification, the gay and courtly manners mark for him the height of culture and of art.

The *Defense of the Epilog* marks the end of the critical activity of Dryden's second period.² It remains only to

¹ I, 177.

² The fact that the *Defense of the Epilog* was omitted from some copies of the second edition of *The Conquest of Granada* (1673) and from all later editions seems to indicate that Dryden soon became ashamed of it.

make brief mention of two non-critical works which show the transition to the third period. *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* (1674) gives evidence of a decided change in our author's artistic purposes. Scott is no doubt correct in supposing that this piece, an opera, could never have been seriously intended for the stage; there could, then, have been very little financial motive for the writing of it. Here we have, it thus appears, an author who has been adapting his work to the taste of king and court following for once the promptings of his own judgment. In taking his material from the still obscure *Paradise Lost* Dryden gives incontrovertible evidence of literary judgment far above contemporary modes. The result of his effort is what we should expect: tho tinged with courtly smartness and adorned with turns of thought and polisht riming verse, *The State of Innocence* contains passages of rare dignity and beauty.

Aureng-Zebe, a Tragedy (1675) is the last and best of Dryden's heroic plays—best because it is least heroic. It is in the prolog to this play that our author makes the profession of a change of taste which marks the beginning of the third critical period. "Agreeably to what might be expected from this declaration," says Scott, "the verse used in *Aureng-Zebe* is of that kind which may be most easily applied to the purposes of ordinary dialog. There is much less of ornate structure and emphatic swell, than occurs in the speeches of Almanzor and Maximin; and Dryden, though late, seems to have at length discovered, that the language of true passion is inconsistent with that regular modulation, to maintain which the actor must mouth each couplet in a sort of recitative."¹ It may be added that in the more vital features of the play, in the characters and action, *Aureng-*

¹ Scott-Saintsbury, v, 182.

Zebe comes nearer to life than any of our author's preceding tragedies. This play, then, like the *State of Innocence*, foreshadows a change in the direction of romanticism.

This period as a whole is best described as one of perfect conformity. We have found in it, especially at first, some of the doctrine and a good deal of the pose of neoclassicism; and in a sense these persist throughout. Nevertheless neoclassicism does not give the key-note to this period. When Dryden had carefully worked up an epic poem in praise of the king he was under the necessity of explaining and defending his method, and, since the poem had been wrought with infinite pains, it was truly represented as a work of the judgment. But once started on the really characteristic work of the period, our author threw his judgment to the winds. It was all to the glory of the king, as had been the poem referred to above, but now the king required extravagance rather than reason, and extravagance was supplied. To be sure it was put into a highly polished and conventional form, but this only served the more to cut it off from life and from the ideals of Dryden's earlier period. And in his criticism our author set himself to justify the form and content of this literature, and to denounce the older English drama, which, of course, stood in direct contrast to it.

Considered from a purely formal point of view, it is true, his critical methods remained those of a neoclassicist, but the plays which he wrote and defended were such as would have put to the blush any French classicist or any good-sense author of eighteenth century England. The English heroic play was, to be sure, related to the French classic drama: its versification, its conventionality of plot and character, etc., were neoclassic traits. In its general spirit, moreover, it was no doubt related to the contemporary baroque architecture and painting of the continent. But it cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the form of play

of which we are talking was peculiar to England: the exuberant complexity of many of its plots, the extravagance of its characters, its negligence of the probabilities of the real world were not in the least classical, but, on the contrary, thoroly, unmistakably English. So it is necessary to insist upon the fact that altho the forms of Dryden's theory were, at this time, the same, in large measure, as those of the real neoclassicists, the inner, organizing force of his activity was not the classicist creed—in fact was not a creed at all. His use of the classicist doctrines merely resulted in a sort of pseudo-neoclassicism. So when I say that this critical period was one of conformity I mean to imply that during this time Dryden's work—poems, plays, and criticism alike—was but a phase of the life of the court. The court, not rigidly classical in its life or tastes, demanded a characteristic literature; and Dryden, perfectly adapted to his surroundings, quick to respond to every demand made upon him, was the one best fitted to produce that literature, and to explain and defend it. If the criticism which grew out of these circumstances, while preserving much of the outward form of neoclassicism, is not true to its inner spirit, this fact hardly gives occasion for surprise.

THE THIRD PERIOD.

One cannot read far into the criticism which Dryden produced between 1675 and 1679 without discovering that both in substance and spirit it divides itself sharply from that of the period which immediately preceded it. There is here a return to the feeling which inspired the best passages of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. The love for Shakespeare and his contemporaries which was so strong upon our author during his first period, has returned with redoubled force. And with this change there is noticeable a remarkable

increase in sincerity. Here, as never before, we feel that we are getting at Dryden's inmost convictions.

I shall attempt to show that the new spirit which has come over our author's criticism connects itself with a change in his literary and financial relations—especially his relations with the court. In his second period we have seen Dryden loaded with such favors as had fallen to the lot of no English poet before him. But sooner than one might expect thorns began to appear among his laurels. As early as 1671 was produced upon the stage *The Rehearsal*, by the Duke of Buckingham and others, in which our author's plays were made a public laughing stock. In 1672 Dryden was violently attacked, again on the score of his plays, by Mathew Clifford in his *Four Letters*. In 1673 came the famous controversy with Elkanah Settle, which showed Dryden's hold upon the public to be astonishingly precarious. This quarrel was connected with our author's much more important relations with John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. This brilliant young nobleman, an active, though capricious, patron of letters, had bestowed his favor very liberally upon Dryden.¹ But unfortunately the latter formed a connection with the Earl of Mulgrave, an enemy of Rochester's. Rochester, without any better reason than this, introduced Elkanah Settle to the royal favor. Settle's *Empress of Morocco* (1673) was first acted at Whitehall by the Lords and Ladies of the court, an honor which had never been paid to any of Dryden's compositions. On the stage it had an exceptionally long run, and, according to Dennis, it was the first play to be published with cuts and sold for two shillings. After Settle Rochester took up first Crowne and then Otway, each of whom seems to have occu-

¹ In his dedication of *Marriage a la Mode* (1673) Dryden gave Rochester profuse thanks for favors procured at court. Cf. Scott-Saintsbury, iv, 255.

pied for a time the position at court which rightfully belonged to the laureate. Not content with these slights put upon Dryden, Rochester attacked him in an anonymous imitation of Horace, *An Allusion to the Tenth Satire*. Of more importance was Mulgrave's *Essay on Satire*, a piece of sarcasm, frank to the point of brutality, directed against both Rochester and the King. Scott supposes that this was merely revised by Dryden, perhaps about 1675. But when it was anonymously made public in 1679, it was Dryden who was held responsible for it. In consequence, upon the night of the eighteenth of December, 1679, he was waylaid and beaten by ruffians in the hire of Rochester.

The fact that in 1679 Dryden was readily believed to be the author of a satire on the King suggests a decline of royal favor. In the dedication of *Aureng-Zebe*, addressing Lord Mulgrave, Dryden wrote: "As I am no successor to Homer in his wit, so neither do I desire to be in his poverty. I can make no rhapsodies, nor go abegging at the Grecian doors, while I sing the praises of their ancestors. The times of Virgil please me better, because he had an Augustus for his patron; and, to draw the allegory nearer you, I am sure I shall not want a Maecenas with him. It is for your lordship to stir up that remembrance in his Majesty, which his many avocations of business have caused him, I fear, to lay aside."¹

About the time of the appearance of the *Essay on Satire*, says Scott, "Mulgrave seems . . . to have fallen into disgrace, and was considered as in opposition to the court. Dryden was deprived of his intercession and appears in some degree to have shared his disgrace."² As to the results

¹ Scott-Saintsbury, v. 196.

² As a proof of Dryden's opposition to the court Christie mentions that in a satire against Shaftesbury published very shortly before the appearance of *Absalom and Achitophel* "he is made to figure in Shaftesbury's train, as

of this loss of favor he adds: "It is said distinctly by one libeller, that his pension was for a time interrupted. This does not seem likely: it is more probable, that Dryden shared the general fate of the household of Charles II, whose appointments were but irregularly paid; but perhaps his supposed delinquency made it more difficult for him than others to obtain redress."¹

It remains only to add to this recital the evidence from Dryden's works. In his dedication of *Aureng-Zebe* (1679) he complained bitterly against the court. In the preface to *All for Love*² (1678), and the dedication of *The Kind Keeper*³ (1678) he returned to the attack with even greater

poet laureate to Shaftesbury, imagined to have been elected king of Poland." The satire referred to is given in a note as "A modest Vindication of the Earl of Shaftesbury, in a Letter to a Friend, concerning his being elected King of Poland." *Poetical Works*, xlvi.

¹ Scott-Saintsbury, I, 195-6.

² "Men of pleasant conversation (at least esteemed so), and endued with a trifling kind of fancy, perhaps helped out with some smattering of Latin, are ambitious to distinguish themselves from the herd of gentlemen, by their poetry. . . .

"And is not this a wretched affectation, not to be contented with what fortune has done for them, and sit down quietly with their estates, but they must call their wits in question, and needlessly expose their nakedness to public view? Not considering that they are not to expect the same approbation from sober men, which they found from their flatterers after the third bottle. If a little glittering in discourse has passed them on us for witty men, where was the necessity of undeceiving the world? Would a man who has an ill title to an estate, but yet is in possession of it; would he bring it of his own accord, to be tried at Westminster? We, who write, if we want the talent, yet have the excuse that we do it for a poor subsistence; but what can be urged in their defense, who, not having the vocation of poverty to scribble, out of mere wantonness take pains to make themselves ridiculous? Horace was certainly in the right when he said *that no man is satisfied with his own condition*. A poet is not pleased, because he is not rich; and the rich are discontented, because the poets will not admit them of their number." I, 196-7.

³ "Some few of our nobility are learned, and therefore I will not conclude an absolute contradiction between the terms of nobleman and scholar;

violence. Practically all of the essays of this time breathe a hatred against those in high places which is absolutely out of keeping with the position which Dryden occupied during his earlier period. In accordance with what one is led to expect from our author's changed position is the discovery that the two plays of the period now under discussion were not written with a view to supplying the demands of the market. In 1695 Dryden wrote with regard to the first of these: "I never writ anything for myself but *Antony and Cleopatra*"¹ (*All for Love*). *The Kind Keeper, or Mr. Limberham* (1678), a comedy, he professed to have written as "an honest satire against our crying sin of keeping." It was a complete failure—being acted but three nights. "The crime," says Dryden in his dedication, "for which it suffered, was that which is objected against the satires of Juvenal, that it expressed too much of the vice which it decried." But he will not remonstrate, "for," he continues, "their authority is, and shall be, ever sacred to me, as much absent as present, and in all alterations of their fortunes, who for these reasons have stopt its further appearance on the theater."² Christy, in his memoir of Dryden, suggests: "It is to be inferred from Dryden's language that strong remonstrances from powerful friends of his own, probably from the highest placed in the land, led him to withdraw this piece."³ Since keeping was the vice made popular by the court, this play is first-rate evidence

but as the world goes now, 'tis very hard to predicate one upon the other; and 'tis yet more difficult to prove, that a nobleman can be a friend to poetry. Were it not for two or three instances in Whitehall and in the town, the poets of this age would find so little encouragement of their labors, and so few understanders, that they might have leisure to turn pamphleteers, and augment the number of those abominable scribblers, who, in this time of license, abuse the press, almost every day, with nonsense, and railing against the government." Scott-Saintsbury, VI, 8.

¹ II, 152.² Scott-Saintsbury, VI, 9.³ P. xi.

that Dryden was, at the time of its writing, in a state of rebellion against his royal patron. It is significant that it was acted at the Duke's theater, which was patronized chiefly by the citizen class.

During our author's second period his plays and criticism were given over to the exemplification and defense of the tastes to which the court had given popularity. Now that his relations with the court had altered he returned both in his plays and in his criticism, to greater sanity, genuineness, and real poetic spirit.

It was in the prolog to *Aureng-Zebe, or the Great Mogul* (1675) that Dryden first proclaimed his new faith; the theory of the heroic play, the admiration for rime had gone, and love of Shakespeare had returned. Two years later, in the *Apology for Heroic Poetry*, came an elaborate prose statement of the new doctrines, which, after all, turn out to be but those of the first period clarified and reinforced. One who comes to this *Apology* fresh from the *Defense of the Epilog* may be pardoned for wondering if the two works are from the same hand. In the *Defense* Dryden taxed all his ingenuity to pick flaws in the works of the Elizabethan masters; now, bolstering himself up with numerous quotations from Longinus, he remonstrates with all his force against carping criticism. The critic, so he maintains, should pass his judgment in favor of the sublime genius that sometimes errs rather than prefer the indifferent author who "makes few faults, but seldom or never rises to any excellence." And then follows the beautiful passage, loosely quoted from Longinus, in which the great genius is likened to a man of large possessions who "will not debase himself to the management of every trifle," and the correct author, to a person of mean fortune, "who manages his store with extreme frugality, or rather parsimony." The description of the "correct" author is the classic denunciation of the

entire tribe: "This kind of genius writes indeed correctly. A wary man he is in grammar, very nice as to solecism or barbarism, judges to a hair of little decencies, knows better than any man what is not to be written, and never hazards himself so far as to fall, but plods on deliberately, and, as a grave man ought, is sure to put his staff before him; in short, he sets his heart upon it, and with wonderful care makes his business sure; that is, in plain English, neither to be blamed or praised."¹

Having, in the first paragraph of the essay, paid a generous tribute to *Paradise Lost*, "undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced," Dryden goes on to make a general plea for the freedom of the poetic imagination. His opponents, interpreting the Aristotelian doctrine of imitation to suit their taste, would keep poetry near to the actualities of life. Dryden holds that poetry which has pleased all ages must be an imitation of nature, and therefore we are justified in giving the principle the most liberal interpretation. That is, he is practically throwing the principle of imitation overboard, and working out new rules on the basis of art history. Relying on these he defends bold figures of speech and the use of fairies and other supernatural agencies; in particular he defends Milton, Cowley, and himself against their detractors. And with full assurance of victory he concludes: "but all reasonable men will conclude it necessary, that sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and consequently with the most figurative expressions."²

This essay reminds one strongly of the *Essay of Heroic*

¹ I, 180. In reading this passage one should remember that in 1671, in the preface to *An Evening's Love*, Dryden wrote: "I think there is no folly so great in any poet of our age, as the superfluity and waste of wit was in some of our predecessors."

² I, 190.

Plays (1672), but in reality it is very different. In the essay of 1672 Dryden defended the heroic play with all its extravagances; but now, in 1677, he is defending the great epic poets, Homer, Virgil, and Milton. Ker describes the situation exactly: "Dryden, like Tasso before him, is compelled to stand up against the scholars who have learned their lesson too well; it is as if he foresaw the sterilizing influence of the prose-understanding, and the harm that might be done by correctness if the principles of correctness were vulgarized."¹ The fact that here for the first time Dryden draws upon Longinus is sufficient to show that a new spirit has come over him.

The *Heads of an Answer to Rymer*, a rough outline of an intended answer to Thomas Rymer's *Tragedies of the Last Age*, was not designed for publication. Written, like the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, without any possible selfish motive, we are justified in supposing that in it we have an especially sincere expression of opinion. From the point of view of the similarity of the circumstances under which the two works were composed, it is interesting to notice that in the *Heads of an Answer* Dryden returns very definitely to the doctrines of the earlier essay. Rymer, a rigid scholastic, has ruthlessly examined the plays of Shakespeare and Fletcher in the light furnished by the strictest pseudo-classic rules. And Dryden, who, in 1672, was himself inclined to carp at these two, now takes up the cudgels in their defense.

His argument as a whole is based on the theory of the historical development of the drama: Aristotle's experience was necessarily limited to the Greek theater, hence his definition of a play is too narrow; if English plays have not the beauties of those of Greece, they have others—perhaps greater. Referring to the success of the English drama,

¹ I, lviii.

Dryden says: "And one reason for that success is, in my opinion, this, that Shakespeare and Fletcher have written to the genius of the age and nation in which they lived; for tho nature, as he objects, is the same in all places, and reason too the same, yet the climate, the age, the disposition of the people, to whom a poet writes, may be so different, that what pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience."¹

In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, it will be remembered, in attempting to define the quality which distinguished English poetry from French, Dryden hit upon the terms, "masculine fancy" and "spirit in the writing." Here in the *Heads of an Answer*, he is laboring to make clear the nature of the same quality; and the terms which now serve his purpose, *e. g.* "the genius of poetry in the writing," carry back over the intervening thirteen years to the earlier work. Notice, in this connection, the spirit and terminology of the following passage: "Rapin attributes more to the *dictio*, that is, to the words and discourse of a tragedy, than Aristotle has done, who places them in the last rank of beauties; perhaps only last in order, because they are the last product of the design. . . . Rapin's words are remarkable: It is not the admirable intrigue, the surprising events, and the extraordinary incidents, that make the beauty of a tragedy; it is the discourses, when they are natural and passionate."²

Within the year of the writing of the *Heads of an Answer to Rymer* came also the production of *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*, a tragedy on the subject of Antony and Cleopatra, avowedly written in imitation of Shakespeare. Dryden's characters and plot are not up to the Shakespearean standard; neither can his blank verse, as a whole,

¹ Scott-Saintsbury, xv, 385.

² Scott-Saintsbury, xv, 392.

be pronounced equal to that of his great original. But it must be acknowledged that this is the best of all his plays; it is full of noble scenes and of poetical passages which do not suffer by comparison with the best in English literature. Here, in the play which Dryden professedly wrote for himself, the genuinely romantic spirit has replaced the mock heroic. The preface which introduced this play is chiefly remarkable for a spirited attack on the conventionality of French literature; all the feeling which in the two preceding essays was directed against pedants in general is here turned against the poets of France and their English imitators.

In this period, then, during which Dryden is not writing as the favorite of town and court, during which, it appears, he is even cut off from many of his old associations and put under suspicion, his literary productions show him in a state of revolt. The life of the court nauseates him; the degenerate heroic drama, as it is carried on in the hands of succeeding favorites, he can not endure; and no more can he tolerate the clean-cut and heartless neoclassic criticism as he sees it in the works of Rymer. The three pieces of criticism which mark the culmination of the period exhibit a singular unity of feeling. In all of them Dryden strikes out squarely counter to the current of contemporary opinion. In all of them he warmly upbraids merely rational criticism; he maintains that literary types should be left free to develop, that the critic should draw his rules from literature rather than prescribe laws to literature; he contends most of all for the spirit of poetry, for genius in literary material as against all the conventions of form. These three essays are, perhaps, the most remarkable of all Dryden's prose works. Lacking, often, the refined spirit and elegant form of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, for courage, for refreshing sincerity, for unconventional originality, they can hardly be matched from Dryden's other critical works, or from the works of any other critic of Dryden's time.

THE FOURTH PERIOD.

The criticism produced by Dryden during the decade between 1680 and 1689 is best characterized as rationalistic. Here we find well formulated, probably for the first time in England, that common-sense system of literary production and evaluation which had been so well organized by Boileau and was to be further developed by Pope. A reading of this criticism in connection with Dryden's biography immediately suggests the thought that his theory was, during this period, very definitely related to the literary occupations to which, thro the pressure of economic circumstances, he was forced to surrender himself.

During Dryden's second period we have seen him the servant of a court which demanded amusement; during his third period we have seen him cast upon his own resources; but during the period under consideration we find him in a new rôle; as during the second period, he is the servant of a court, but of a court which demands—not amusement—but defense against its enemies. Dryden entered upon his fourth period rather poorer than usual. The King's Theater, in the profits of which he had had a share, had burnt down in 1672, and his income had suffered in consequence. After the production of *All for Love* (1677-8) he quarreled with the King's Company and the contract in accordance with which he had shared in its profits was abrogated. The complaint in the dedication of *Aureng-Zebe* and the belief that his pension had been cut off, show at least that it was irregularly paid. One is somewhat surprised, therefore, to learn that as early as 1679 our author was granted by the king a special annual pension of one hundred pounds, and that in 1683 he was appointed collector of customs for the port of London. The Whigs, representing Protestantism, were becoming more and

more of a menace to the royal faction; and in his hour of need Charles did not disdain to assure himself of Dryden's support. And Dryden, as we have seen, was in no position to refuse to give his services. In 1681 our author produced upon the stage *The Spanish Friar*, his "Protestant play"—surely no evidence of loyalty. But later in the same year he published *Absalom and Achitophel*; and from that time to the death of Charles II, in 1685, there was no interruption in Dryden's devoted service; the king was defended against all his enemies, the church of England against all the sectaries.

But during this time important changes were taking place in the life of the court. The Catholic Duke of York was the heir apparent, and the Duchess of York shared his religious faith. Charles himself was under suspicion of a leaning in the direction of Catholicism. The tide was unmistakably setting in the direction of the church of Rome, and the author of the "Protestant Play" could hardly be expected to remain independent of its influence. The fact that Dryden turned Catholic about the time of the succession of James II, when a change in religion was patently advantageous to him, has been interpreted by more than one of his biographers as evidence of rank turn-coatism. The answer to these has been found in the fact that as early as 1682, in the *Religio Laici*, Dryden gave unmistakable evidence of a genuine leaning in the direction of Catholicism.¹ It seems to me that we have here merely another case to show Dryden's sensitiveness to his environment. No one who sympathetically reads the *Religio Laici* or Dryden's later religious poems can doubt the sincerity of his conversion: neither can anyone who has taken into account the changing atmosphere of the court imagine that this conversion was quite independent of our author's *milieu*.

¹ Cf. Saintsbury, *Biography of Dryden*, p. 101.

Dryden's world gradually changed, and he himself, with perfect sincerity, gradually changed with it.

As one result of Dryden's religious conversion he was continued in office as the chief literary representative of the court, his pension of one hundred pounds being guaranteed him by a royal patent. In 1686 he published his *Defense of Papers written by the late King and the Duchess of York*—which papers seemed to indicate (a fact now much to the purpose) that Charles II had been at heart a Catholic. And from this time down to the dethronement of James II in 1688–89 Dryden served his second master as faithfully as he had served his first.

The mere labor demanded by Dryden's new position of chief apologist for the crown, was tremendous. In Ker's list of his publications there are to be found within the limits of this period the titles of fourteen works which formed part of his public service. Among these are registered, first of all, works like the translation of Maimburg's *History of the League* and the *Defense of Papers written by the late King and the Duchess of York*, long and dreary pieces of prose which must have meant to their author weary months of drudgery. But the chief works of the list are the satirical and didactic masterpieces: *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), *The Medal* (1682), *MacFlecknoe* (1682), *Absalom and Achitophel*, Part II (1682), *Religio Laici* (1682), and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). For us it is merely necessary to notice two things with regard to these supreme works. In the first place not a single one of them was introduced with a critical dissertation of great importance. The production of this form of literature was not calculated to keep alive in our author's mind his former interest in the vital problems of esthetics. Even the mere quantity of his criticism was cut down; we have only four slender pieces to represent what was Dryden's most productive literary

period. The other point which demands our attention is the fact that satire belongs distinctly to the rationalistic, rather than to the romantic, consciousness ; to the period of Pope, rather than to the period of Shakespeare. Since, then, the characteristic poetic production of this period links Dryden to the eighteenth century, rather than to the sixteenth, one is prepared to expect in the critical essays a predominantly rationalistic tone.

Before entering upon a discussion of the characteristic criticism of the fourth period it is necessary to notice an essay which is clearly transitional. In 1679 Dryden published *Troilus and Cressida*, rather an "improvement" of Shakespeare's play of the same name than a noble imitation like *All for Love*. And with this play, which in itself seemed to indicate a dying down of poetical fervor, he published his *Preface containing the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*—a most interesting composite of the antagonistic spirits of the third and fourth periods. In the introduction, although a high regard for Shakespeare is expressed, the chief emphasis is laid upon his petty faults ; his phrases are, some of them, "scarce intelligible," others, "ungrammatical and coarse ;" his style is "so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure." The essay on *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* is introduced with a formal outline : our author thinks it would be neither unprofitable nor unpleasant to inquire "(1) how far we ought to imitate our poets, Shakespeare and Fletcher, in their tragedies ; and this will occasion another inquiry, (2) how those two writers differ among themselves." But in order to prosecute these investigations he will first attempt "to discover the grounds and reasons of all criticism, applying them in this place only to tragedy.¹" Then there follows

¹I, 207.

one of the most carefully reasoned of all Dryden's essays. Beginning with Aristotle's definition of a play our author proceeds in an abstract, formal manner to discuss the action, the manners, the characters, and the passions. After the regular discussion of each heading Shakespeare and Fletcher are brought up for comparison, and one who has recently read the *Heads of an Answer* may well be surprised to discover that they are often measured by the classical standard as ruthlessly as Rymer himself could have wished. But, happily, this essay is one of those which are remarkable for their "purple patches." It is evident from one of these that tho Dryden's new formalism can make no room for Shakespeare, the old love of him still survives.

In the preface to Dryden's translation of Ovid's epistles (1680) we have the first piece of criticism perfectly representative of the fourth period; it is representative both in its brevity and in its thoroly prosaic tone. The only really significant passage in it is one in which Ovid is guardedly praised for the vivacity of his poetry, but roundly scored for not having been a better master of his wit. "Nothing too much," is our author's law, and it is applied especially to wit, to eloquence, to the inward fire that may now and then strain a conventionality.

In the dedication of *The Spanish Friar* (1681) we might expect a different feeling. The play which it introduced was written, not to support the king, but to catch the public ear ;¹ and, despite its faults, one must confess that it has in it some of the life of real comedy. Here, then, if anywhere, we might expect a return to the standards of 1678. But what do we find? First of all, a criticism, searching and just,

¹ It must be remembered that at this time, just after the "Popish Plots," the Protestant party was so strong that Dryden was risking nothing ; and, on the other hand, in case of a Protestant triumph his anti-catholic play would have opened up to him a way into the new court.

of our author's own heroic plays: they cry vengeance upon him for their extravagance, and he wishes them heartily in the fire. His only excuse for them is that they were bad enough to please (*i. e.* to please Charles II); but for the future he is resolved to settle himself no reputation "by the applause of fools." The effect of the "prose-understanding" is not entirely evil; if it condemns the romantic by judicious strictures and faint praise, it damns the heroic utterly.

Dryden was too philosophical to rest content with individual literary judgments; he must give his theory abstract statement. It is significant that when he comes to do this he takes his figure from architecture, of all the arts the one, perhaps, in which a riotous fancy can have least place: "But as in a room contrived for state, the height of the roof should bear a proportion to the area; so, in the heightenings of poetry, the strength and vehemence of the figures should be suited to the occasion, the subject, and the persons."¹ Propriety of thoughts and words is the chief virtue of a play. Here, it thus appears, even in the dedication of a popular play, Dryden's new deity, good sense, is the supreme god.

In the preface to *Sylvæ* (1685) we find that after a lapse of four years our author's esthetic creed has remained unchanged. With great show of erudition, but without touching upon a single vital literary problem, he discusses the four authors he has been translating. In the one passage which has real significance he treats Cowley as he treated Ovid in the preface of 1680. It is true that Cowley had the soul of poetry, the "warmth and vigor of fancy," "but he lacked somewhat of equal thoughts," and "somewhat of the purity of English." And after he has applied his unvarying measure, Dryden peevishly demands what rules of morality or respect he has broken: "There are few poets who deserve to be models in all they write."² Horace himself could hardly

¹ I, 247.² I, 268.

have excelled this for classic coolness ; one is instantly reminded of nodding Homer. There is nothing here, except, of course, the over-sensitive apology for irreverence, which, so far as theory is concerned, might not have been written by Pope.

But it is in the preface to *Albion and Albanius* (1685) that Dryden undertakes the formal exposition of his doctrine. The essay begins with a highly significant definition of wit. It will be remembered that in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1665) Dryden wrote, referring to Jonson : "I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit."¹ *Wit*, in this connection, was evidently used to signify the possession of a prolific poetic genius, or an abundance of poetic material. In the preface to *Annus Mirabilis* (1666) this notion was decidedly modified : "wit-writing" was there defined as a nimble spaniel, which "beats over and ranges through the field of memory, till it springs the quarry it hunted after ;"² and "wit-written" was described as that which is "well defined, the happy result of thought, or product of imagination." This confusing division is evidently a compromise ; wit is thought of as being at once the creative quality of the imagination and the well-defined product of the judgment. In 1677, in the *Apology for Heroic Poetry*, Dryden formally defined wit as "a propriety of thoughts and words,"³ but used this two-edged definition to show that in the treatment of great subjects the poetic imagination should be allowed free rein. But now, in the preface to *Albion and Albanius*, he develops this definition and attempts to show on the strength of it that all poetic beauty depends upon the exercise of the judgment. Thus in the course of twenty years one of the most important terms of seventeenth century criticism, following the evolution of our author's mind,

¹ Cf. *ante*, p. 72.

² Cf. *ante*, p. 83.

³ I, 190.

has exactly reversed its meaning. With its new definition it is made to cover a complete system of poetic theory. The thoughts are to be proper to the subject, the words, to the thoughts, "and from both of these, if they be judiciously performed, the delight of poetry results."¹ Pope, in the *Essay on Criticism*, seems merely to return an echo :

"Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent as more suitable."

The criticism of this period, it thus appears, is rationalistic. In its general spirit it bears some resemblance to that of the second period, nevertheless the two should be sharply distinguished. The critical theory of the second period, it will be remembered, was characterized as pseudo-neoclassic; that of the period now under consideration is best defined as English rationalistic. The English heroic play which furnished the occasion for the characteristic criticism of the second period was a natural outgrowth of the life of the Restoration, and with the passing of that life, it, too, past away with all its related theory. Even before it had reached its zenith there had appeared in England the beginnings of a school of critics, best represented by Hobbes, who introduced into their thinking about literature the spirit and doctrines of English sensationalistic philosophy. The French neoclassicists, we have seen, made literature rational and intelligible by working it out in accordance with an *a priori* scheme attributed to the ancients. The English rationalists, thorogoining sensationalists in philosophy, achieved practically the same result by bringing art down to the actualities of life.² To them prose furnished an ideal

¹ I, 270.

² Cf. Preface to Ovid's *Epistle*, I, 233. Here, speaking of Ovid's descriptions of the passions, Dryden says he needs no other judges of them than the generality of his readers: "for, all passions being inborn with us, we

form and, in the eighteenth century, the realistic novel, an ideal content: even in Dryden's day they were dubbed "prose-critics." Under the predominance of these prose-critics the heroic play fell under constantly increasing condemnation. Dryden's unequivocal denunciation of it in the dedication of *The Spanish Friar*, furnishes a measure of his evolution: during his fourth period he was, at least in his general spirit, a rationalist. The worship of good sense had become his controlling motive.

This rationalism is precisely what an examination of Dryden's life during this period would lead one to expect. We have seen him constrained by circumstances to throw the chief energy saved from uninspiring hack-work into a series of poetical satires. The first result of this new direction of his activity was naturally a diminution of his interest in critical problems. But the second result was more important. A man like Dryden, versatile, easily adapting himself to new conditions, could hardly be imagined dividing his mental life; doing his daily stint of toil for the royal cause and then taking up the consideration of literary problems with his old romantic fervor. On the contrary, he gave himself up wholly to the required labor. So thoroly did he fuse his personality with the cause of his party that in *MacFlecknoe*, passages of *Absalom and Achitophel*, and in other poems, he paid at once his own scores and those of the king. Satire had become his natural mode of expression. But satire is itself but a sort of criticism; it has always been the form assumed by the highly trained, versifying prose-understanding. If, then, while satire was Dryden's natural mode of expression his critical essays

are almost equally judges when we are concerned in the representation of them." And a little later he criticizes Ovid for leaving "the imitation of nature, and the cooler dictates of his judgment, for the false applause of fancy."

became eminently rationalistic, it is merely because they were of a piece with his whole mental life.¹

THE FIFTH PERIOD.

The fifth period of Dryden's critical development includes, approximately, the last decade of his life. With the revolution of 1688-9 our author lost at once his offices and his pension; but what was apparently a crushing reverse proved to be a boon—at once to Dryden and to English literature. His position now became practically that of a free man of letters. And in this character he was left at liberty to give himself up to literary labors of his own choice. Under these circumstances his critical faculty naturally regained free play. The result is noticeable, first of all, in the imposing amount of criticism written during this period. But the quality is more remarkable than the quantity; beginning the period as a rationalist, Dryden gradually developed in the direction of the theory and feeling of the first and third periods. The old love for the spirit of great literature returned, and more and more dominated the good-sense mood and method. The criticism is distinguished from that of the first and third periods by a broader, steadier grasp of esthetic problems and by a beautiful evenness of feeling. It is, to be sure, a sort

¹ Perhaps the reader does not need to be again reminded that I do not pretend to have accounted completely for all the differences between the various periods of Dryden's critical development. The causes for the transition from the third to the fourth period seem to have been especially complex. I have my attention drawn to the fact that during the third period Dryden leaned pretty heavily on Rapin and that, although he was using his contemporary French critic in the support of romanticism, Rapin may have influenced him in the direction of rationalism. Rapin had after all more affinity to Rymer than to Dryden. It is not impossible that our author's very attacks on Rymer may have reacted in favor of Rymer's own doctrines.

of classicism which we have here, but a deep and humanized classicism.

After the downfall of James II our author, now nearly sixty years old, was cast out to write for a living. During the first years of the period he was still partially dependent, but his dependence was of a kind which did not entail actual servitude. *Don Sebastian* (1690) he dedicated to the Earl of Leicester, a supporter of the new government. In the dedication of *Amphitryon* (1690) to Sir William Leveson Gower, also a revolutionist, he wrote: "And as, since this wonderful revolution, I have begun with the best pattern of humanity, the Earl of Leicester, I shall continue to follow the same method, in all to whom I shall address; and endeavor to pitch on such only as have been pleased to own me in this ruin of my small fortune; who, though they are of a contrary opinion themselves, yet blame not me for adhering to a lost cause, and judging for myself, what I cannot choose but judge, so long as I am a patient sufferer, and no disturber of the government."¹ One of Dryden's most generous friends was Charles, Earl of Dorset and Middlesex, after the revolution appointed to the post of Lord Chamberlain. Addressing to this nobleman his *Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693), Dryden wrote: "I must ever acknowledge, to the honor of your lordship, and the eternal memory of your charity, that, since this revolution, wherein I have patiently suffered the ruin of my small fortune, and the loss of that poor subsistence which I had from two kings, whom I had served more faithfully than profitably to myself; then your Lordship was pleased, out of no other motive than your nobleness, without any desert of mine, or the least solicitation from me, to make me a most bountiful present, which at that time, when

¹ Scott-Saintsbury, VIII, 7.

I was most in want of it, came most seasonably and unexpectedly to my relief. . . . I must not presume to defend the cause for which I suffer, because your Lordship is engaged against it; but the more you are so, the greater is my obligation to you, for your laying aside all the considerations of factions and parties, to do an action of pure disinterested charity."¹ Dryden's patrons were, it thus appears, persons who were drawn to him either out of personal regard or because of an interest in letters: being, most of them, at least, opposed to our author in politics, they could not ask political services. Dryden's relations with them were always dignified and honorable. The same can be said of his attitude toward the government. In his dedication of the *Aeneis* (1697), about to discuss Virgil's relations with Augustus, he remarked by way of introduction: "I shall continue to speak my thoughts like a free-born subject, as I am; though such things, perhaps, as no Dutch commentator could, and I am sure no Frenchman durst."²

This honorable attitude toward patrons and government is at least partially to be explained from the fact that Dryden had now thrown himself chiefly upon the support of the rapidly increasing reading public. It is true that in 1691 he wrote a panegyric, *Eleanora*, on the deceased Countess of Abdingdon, a person whom he acknowledges never to have seen, and that he received for the performance of this task a fee of five hundred pounds. But the translations were the characteristic works of this period, and it is evident that they became more and more remunerative. The translation of Virgil (1697), as appears from a letter to William Walsh,³ was published by subscription: a hundred and two copies, "having an hundred and two brass cuts,

¹ II, 38.² II, 174.³ Scott-Saintsbury, XVIII, 191.

with the coat of arms of the subscriber to each cut," were subscribed for at five guineas apiece; another lot were taken at two guineas the copy. In a letter to Jacob Tonson¹ Dryden stated that he had just finished the seventh *Aeneid* and expected soon to start the eighth, and continued: "when that is finished, I expect fifty pounds in good silver." The number of books for which this sum was to be received is not clear. A little later in the same letter Dryden added: "but the thirty shillings upon every book remains with me." Pope had heard that the Virgil translation as a whole brought Dryden the sum of 1,200 pounds. For the *Fables* (1700), according to a signed agreement still extant,² Dryden was to receive from Tonson the sum of three hundred pounds.³

In connection with our author's changed position there is noticeable a general elevation of his moral standards. This is to be remarked, first of all, in his attitude toward his art. In his dedication of the *Examen Poeticum* (1693), after a discussion of the corruption of governments, he continued: "These considerations have given me a kind of contempt for those who have risen by unworthy ways. I am not ashamed to be little, when I see them so infamously great; neither do I know why the name of poet should be dishonorable to me, if I am truly one, as I hope I am; for I will never do anything that will dishonor it."⁴ In Dryden's view of the moral aspects of literature, also, there took place a notable alteration. In the last paragraph of his last critical work, the preface to the *Fables*, he replied to Jeremy Collier's attack on him: "I shall say the less of Mr. Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine, which can be truly

¹ *Ibid.*, 123.² *Ibid.*, 201.³ Cf. Beljame, pp. 198 ff.⁴ II, 2.

argued of obscenity, profaneness, or immorality, and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal reason to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance."¹

As to our author's literary activity under the new circumstances, the first thing to demand notice is a decline in his dramatic production and a consequent falling off of interest in the problems of the stage. The five plays which came from his pen between 1690 and 1694 attained dramatic and literary merit to a rapidly diminishing degree. At the beginning of this, his last period of play writing, Dryden wrote: "Having been longer acquainted with the stage than any other poet now living, and having observed how difficult it was to please; that the humors of comedy were almost spent; that love and honor (the mistaken topics of tragedy) were quite worn out; that the theaters could not support their charges; that the audience forsook them; that young men, without learning, set up for judges, and that they talked loudest who understood the least; all these discouragements had not only weaned me from the stage, but had also given me a loathing for it. But enough of this: the difficulties continue; they increase; and I am still condemned to dig in those exhausted mines."² And in 1692 he protested: "Nobody can imagine that, in my declining age, I write willingly, or that I am desirous of exposing, at this time of day, the small reputation which I have gotten on the theater. The subsistence which I had from the former government is lost; and the reward I have from the stage is so little, that it is not worth my labor."³ The story of Dryden's dramatic degeneration, then, may be summed up as follows. In 1690, having been cast upon the resources of his pen, he turned to the public, especially to the citizen class, which,

¹ II, 272.² Scott-Saintsbury, VII, 307.³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 221.

with the coming of William and Mary, had gained a decided ascendancy. The public was most easily reached thro the theater; hence *Don Sebastian* (1690), worked out with extraordinary care. But Dryden soon discovered that times were changed. Citizen morality was more and more making itself felt, and plays were more and more subjected to sharpest criticism.¹ In fact the theater seemed to be sinking into a certain decline. Thus dramatic work, never to Dryden's taste, grew constantly more irksome; and at last, according to his own statement, the economic motive for continuing it well nigh disappeared. But for us the important thing to notice is, that Dryden lost interest in dramatic problems. Not one of the five plays of this period is preceded by a critical dissertation of any importance. The change which began in 1684 with the publication of *Miscellany Poems* is now complete, and it is chiefly in connection with his translations that we must henceforth follow the development of Dryden's critical theory.

The translations of this period include selections from Juvenal, Persius, and Ovid, the works of Virgil, and the so-called fables from Homer, Boccacio, and Chaucer. Four of the five volumes in which these translations appeared Dryden introduced with critical prefaces. Occasionally, notably in the dedication of the *Examen Poeticum* (1693), he wandered back into the discussion of the drama, but for the most part his attention was given up to the poetic forms, especially to the epic. A chronological list of the translations of the last seven years of Dryden's life shows that his interest developed steadily in the direction of really poetic appreciation. After his long period of satire writing Juvenal

¹ Cf. James Wright: *Historia Histrionica* (1699); *An Apology for the life of the Colly Cibber by himself*, ed. by Robert W. Lowe, London, 1889, I, 187; Beljame, *Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres*, 2nd ed., 1897, pp. 198-224, and 244-59.

may naturally have interested him; but, left free to follow his literary impulse, he translated Virgil, whose formal virtues few have been able to appreciate more sincerely, and during his last years worked over with amazing freedom and spirit selections from Homer, Boccacio, and Chaucer.¹ Thus the development of his criticism during this period seems to correspond to a development in his poetical activity.

The first important critical work of this period is, naturally enough, on satire. *A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, published in 1693 with a translation of the satires of Juvenal, is a long and formal treatise liberally padded with borrowed learning. Dryden carefully announces his purpose to give, "from the best authors, the origin, the antiquity, the growth, the change, and the completement of satire among the Romans; to describe, if not define, the nature of that poem, with its several qualifications and virtues, together with the several sorts of it; to compare the excellencies of Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, and show the particular manner of their satires; and, lastly, to give an account of this new way of version, which is attempted in our performance."² Fortified with an imposing list of authorities, Dryden executes his plan with more than customary method and care. Only in the wanderings of his introduction does he express

¹ It is to be regretted that studies of Dryden's translations do not furnish sufficient material to warrant a generalization as to his tendency as translator. It seems extremely probable that he allowed himself constantly increasing liberties with his originals. Francis H. Pughe, after an examination of a part of the material involved, comes to the following conclusion: "Wir sehen also, kurz gesagt, Dryden am Anfang seiner Uebersetzerthätigkeit von dem Vorsatz ausgehen, wörtliche Uebersetzung, ebenso wie Nachahmung zu vermeiden, um später einen zwischen Paraphrase und Nachahmung schwankenden Weg einzuschlagen." *John Dryden's Uebersetzungen aus Theokrit*, Breslau, 1894, p. 5.

² 11, 42.

himself on any vital literary problems. As to the war between ancients and moderns, he maintains that in drama and satire the moderns have excelled; Milton is searchingly criticized, but admired for his elevated thoughts and sounding words. It must be confessed, however, that this essay as a whole exhibits more keen discrimination than real literary enthusiasm.

In the epistle dedicatory of the *Examen Poeticum* (1693) we recognize again the Dryden of the first and third periods. It is significant that the immediate occasion for the greater part of this essay is identical with that which we noticed in connection with the *Defense of the Epilog*. In 1672, being attacked by the old-fashioned devotees of the Elizabethans, Dryden replied by belittling Shakespeare's virtues and enlarging upon his faults: in 1693, under exactly the same circumstances, our author gracefully acknowledges the superiority of his great predecessors and challenges the sincerity of his critics.¹ But, recalling in this the spirit of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, he will defend the English Drama against all comers: again the English genius comes to its own; again Dryden searches for words with which to characterize that vital thing which is the heart of English poetry.² The passages in question are distinguished from

¹ "'Tis not with an ultimate intention to pay reverence to the Manes of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson that they commend their writings, but to throw dirt on the writers of this age. . . . Peace be to the venerable shades of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson! none of the living will presume to have any competition with them; as they were our predecessors, so they were our masters." II, 4-5.

² "As little can I grant, that the French dramatic writers excel the English. Our authors as far surpass them in genius, as our soldiers excel theirs in courage. 'Tis true, in conduct they surpass us either way; yet that proceeds not so much from their greater knowledge, as from the difference in tastes in the two nations. They content themselves with a thin design, without episodes, and managed by few persons. Our audience will not be pleased, but with variety of accidents, an underplot, and many actors.

our author's previous expressions on the same subject only by an evident desire to do justice both to the faults of the English and the virtues of the French. A denunciation of Homer's "ungodly man-killers" (heroes) and a tacit commendation of a "more moderate heroism" seem to indicate a temperate, Virgilian state of mind. But if this essay is milder than the great documents of our author's third period, it is filled with the same fine independence.

Dryden's next piece of criticism, the famous *Parallel between Poetry and Painting*, prefixed to a translation of Du Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica* (1695), is unique among his works in its purpose and scope. It resembles most the preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), but in the actual nature of its material it is much more abstract. Here Dryden starts out with the set purpose of laying down the rules of art which belong to poetry and painting in common. In no other work has he undertaken a task so entirely formal; here, then, if anywhere, one might expect a cold outline of the artist's activities approximating, perhaps, the good-sense doctrine of the fourth period. And it must be confessed that in its general tone this essay is far more rationalistic than the one which preceded it. But, nevertheless, a close reading reveals something like an attempt to harmonize the formal conception of literature with the intuitions of a genuinely poetic consciousness. Naturally our author begins the systematic part of his treatise with a statement of rules: this is in the very nature of the case; if there are no accepted laws applying to the artist's methods, then no such treatise as this can be written at all.

They follow the ancients too servilely in the mechanic rules, and we assume too much licence to ourselves, in keeping them only in view at too great a distance. But if our audience had their tastes, our poets could more easily comply with them, than the French writers could come up to the sublimity of our thoughts, or to the difficult variety of our designs." II, 7.

From the practise, then, of "the poets and painters in ancient times and the best ages" rules have been drawn, and these are to furnish the basis of our discussion. Treating the steps of a poet's or painter's work in order, Dryden begins with a discussion of invention, and we are relieved to read: "Invention is the first part, and absolutely necessary to them both; yet no rule ever was or ever can be given, how to compass it."¹ But the disposition, or arrangement, of the work is to be according to law. Coming to the description of the passions, Dryden again admits the inadequacy of rules: "This, says my author, is the gift of Jupiter; and to speak in the same heathen language, we call it the gift of our Apollo—not to be obtained by pains or study, if we are not born to it; for the motions which are studied are never so natural as those which break out in the height of a real passion."² When he comes to the principles of ornamentation Dryden finds the abstract rule too much for him and, with evident compunction, admits the formal indefensibility of the English tragi-comedy. One remark on the cromatic, or coloring, the last step in the production of an art work, shows again that Dryden is attempting to maintain an esthetic balance: "A work may be overwrought as well as underwrought; too much labor often takes away the spirit by adding to the polishing, so that there remains nothing but a dull correctness, a piece without any considerable faults, but with few beauties; for when the spirits are drawn off, there is nothing but a *caput mortuum*."³ Taking into account such passages as these it seems to me that whereas we found in the preface to *Troilus and Cressida* a formal treatment of the rules of the drama with here and there an outbreak of romantic feeling, we are justified in describing the *Parallel* as a studied attempt to harmonize

¹ II, 138.² II, 145.³ II, 152.

the formal, practical, working conception of an artist's labors with the intuitions of a poetic appreciator of the finished art-product. Dryden's theory, it is true, is inadequate to his purpose; he is still bound by the principle of imitation and the allegorical conception of art. But the attempt is none the less evident: an inexplicable genius produces the material, and the judgment disposes it; genius describes the passions, while study and care polish the language.

The dedication with which Dryden introduced his translation of the *Aeneid* (1697) naturally concerns itself with the old question of the relative advantages of drama and epic and the defense and praise of the poetry of Virgil. So it happens, as has been the case with more than one of Dryden's essays, that the really significant passages of this work are in the nature of digressions. In general these significant passages are pretty much of a piece with those which we examined in the dedicatory epistle of the *Examē Poeticum*. Their chief value lies in the fact that, like the epistle of 1693, they exhibit Dryden expressing with his old-time freedom the doctrines of his earliest period. The figure once before used to define his feeling as to the nature of the English poetic spirit is further developed: "For, impartially speaking, the French are as much better critics than the English, as they are worse poets. Thus we generally allow that they better understand the management of a war than our islanders; but we know we are superior to them in the day of battle. They value themselves on their generals, we on our soldiers."¹ In another spirited passage on the same subject he characterizes the informing spirit of English poetry as "a masculine vigor," recalling forcibly his earlier expressions, "masculine fancy" (1665), and "genius of poetry in the writing" (1678). Our author

¹ II, 178.

has consistently maintained, especially in the *Parallel*, that the epic is farther from life than the drama, and thus better adapted to ornamentation; but now he demands, even in the epic, something of genuine virility and passion.¹

It is in the preface to the *Fables* (1700), Dryden's last essay, that the criticism of this period culminates. Here, more than in any other work of the period, we get warm, spontaneous appreciation unmingled with empty formulas. Homer, Chaucer, Ovid, and Boccaccio are the natural subjects of the essay; but it is the first two that call forth the best passages. Here concludes, so far as Dryden is concerned, that long conflict between Homer and Virgil. The result is, first of all, an attempt to estimate the virtues of each without injustice to the other. But one cannot help feeling that, as Homer was Dryden's favorite in youth, so he is at the last. In fact our author states specifically that he has found Homer more according to his genius than the Latin poet. And in passages like the following the nature of his feeling can hardly be mistaken: "The action of Homer, being more full of vigor than that of Virgil, according to the temper of the writer, is of a consequence more pleasing to the reader. One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on fire all at once, and never intermits his heat. 'Tis the same difference which Longinus makes betwixt the effects of eloquence in Demosthenes or Tully; one persuades, the other commands."² Comparing Chaucer

¹ "Let the French and Italians value themselves on their regularity; strength and elevation are our standard. I said before, and I repeat it, that the affected purity of the French has unsinewed their heroic verse. The language of an epic poem is almost wholly figurative: yet they are so fearful of a metaphor, that no example of Virgil can encourage them to be bold with safety. Sure they might warm themselves by that sprightly blaze, without approaching it so close as to singe their wings; they may come as near it as their master." II, 229.

² II, 253.

with Ovid, Dryden comes upon the subject of the much admired "turn of words;" as the poet of Charles II he had much admired this taking ornament, but in his present mood he sees that in strong passions it is always to be shunned. As to Chaucer he speaks praise which can only be compared with his eulogy of Shakespeare: "He must have been a man of most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humors (as we now call them) of the whole English nation, in his age."¹ "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learn'd in all sciences; and, therefore, speaks properly on all subjects."² Even the verse of Chaucer, the meter of which, because of changes in pronunciation, Dryden was quite unable to appreciate, seemed to him to have the "rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it." Coming at a time when Chaucer was considered "a dry old-fashioned wit,"³ the exclusive property of "some old Saxon friends," this frank and hearty appreciation has an astonishingly modern ring. Here is a poet who seems to lack most of the qualities of form which have sometimes appeared to Dryden as the essentials of poetry: and yet he is praised and loved for the truth of nature in him and for his abundance of wit.

This preface, written only a few months before Dryden's death, is, from nearly every point of view, one of his best critical works. There is little theorizing here, to be sure, but there is an abundance of original comparison and sincere appreciation. And the favorites of our author's last days are Homer and Chaucer. It is the inner spirit of poetry which seems now to attract him, rather than niceties of versification. It is noteworthy that the material which he

¹ II, 262.² II, 257.³ II, 264.

is treating here is all of the epic kind ; and it has been for the epic that he has heretofore so steadily insisted on formal virtues.

During his fifth period Dryden has, more than at any other time of his life, been left free to develop his personality. Except for the pressure exerted by the necessity of writing for the public, he has been at liberty to choose his form of activity and to express with perfect sincerity the literary tastes which, in a man of his type, naturally developed under favorable influences. Besides being free from any sort of restraint Dryden has been writing during his last years as the recognized master of English poetry ; this, joined perhaps, with the fact that he has dealt chiefly with classical material, has given him a fine dignity of manner and catholic breadth of feeling. This, then, is the Dryden of the last phase ; and the criticism we have examined is just what one would expect from such a man. Of the five critical documents of the period, the first, we have seen, was transitional : the other four, it seems to me, are related in spirit and material to the essays of the first and third periods. In one respect they indicate a distinct advance over all their predecessors : Dryden has gained in judicial poise, and logicity of thought ; he is trying to bring together his instinctive feelings for literature and his reasoned theory. This very effort, to be sure, savors of the eighteenth century, but Dryden has not again struck the dead-level of the "prose-critics." He has still, especially during the latter part of the period, the fine, free spirit of the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and the preface to *All for Love*. It is mellowed a bit by age, and there is not now so much of the fire of conflict in it, but it is still the same in its nature.

CONCLUSION.

I.

The results of this investigation may be summed up in the statement that Dryden's critical activity was an organic part of his life. And it follows as a corollary of this statement that, since his life, because of its intimate connection with the vicissitudes of the age, divides itself into periods, his criticism, together with his entire literary activity,¹ falls into approximately corresponding periods. During the first

¹ John Stuart Collins, in his extremely valuable work, *Dryden's Dramatic Theory and Praxis* (Leipzig, 1902), makes an elaborate comparison of Dryden's critical theory as set forth in the prefaces and his practise in the plays. The prefaces, especially the passages dealing with rime, the unities, the decorum of the stage, and the like, he examines in order, and in connection with each tries to make out whether the theory enunciated is developed in the accompanying play or in other plays of the same period. His general conclusion is as follows: "On the whole, I fail to discover any such intimate connection between theory and praxis in Dryden's dramatic authorship as might reasonably be expected. Nowhere does he say: 'thus and thus shall be written' and then follow up these exact lines." After recognizing a distinct connection between Dryden's theory and practise during the heroic period, Mr. Collins proceeds. "A comparison of such statements of individual opinion as are to be found in Dryden's essays, prefaces, and dedications regarding points of dramatic technic, with his practise in dramatic composition, leads to the discovery of the lack of any *exact* organic connection in *every* particular between the two: an attempt to show either a complete reconciliation between theory and praxis or a complete divergence of each from the other leads to no precise results."

The obvious comment on this is that the connection which was sought in certain details of dramatic theory and practise might have been found in the general spirit of the two. Dryden was far too careless a play-wright to work out every detail according to theory: but the essays and plays of any particular period were acted upon by the same general influences, were expressions of the same personality at a particular stage of its development, and one would expect to find in them substantial agreement as to mood and purpose.

of these Dryden, with the fine enthusiasm of a young poet still upon him, has not yet settled upon a literary ideal, has not yet submitted himself to the dominance of a formal scheme of theory ; and the criticism of this time is full of genuine appreciations of literature and remarkably modern discussions of literary problems. The second period exhibits a striking unity of development : Dryden becomes the great literary favorite of the court ; in his serious plays he furnishes precisely the heroic literature which the court demands ; and in his criticism, being obliged to defend this literature, he stretches the doctrines of neoclassicism to include the theory of it, and, in self-defense, attacks the rival drama of the great Elizabethans. During the third period our author's central motive is rebellion against all that he has lately believed in and supported : attacked by numberless foes, he is neglected, if not actually discountenanced by the king ; in his serious plays he discontinues the heroic manner for imitation of Shakespeare, while in his comedy he attacks a notorious court vice ; in his criticism he returns to the enthusiasms of his first period, making it his special concern to defend real poetry, above all that of the Elizabethans, against carping fault-finders. At the beginning of the fourth period Dryden is called back, in time of need, to the service of the court ; but now, instead of being expected to write plays for the royal amusement, he is set to produce in rapid succession, pamphlets and satires in defense of his master's cause : and the criticism produced during this period is, as one might expect, meager in quantity, and as to its spirit, coldly rationalistic, approximating the character of eighteenth century English rationalism. During his fifth period our author gains his livelihood chiefly by catering to the constantly growing literary public, and thus gains moral and intellectual independence ; after having failed at play-writing he gives almost undivided attention to his translations : his

time and energy being now entirely taken up by purely literary labors, his critical dissertations, some of them long and carefully worked out, gradually increase in spirit and originality till they resemble those of the first and third periods; they differentiate themselves from these by an evenness of tone and a certainty of grasp, and, more especially, by an evident attempt on Dryden's part to harmonize his instinctive feelings toward literature with his reasoned judgments.

II.

I have not been able to discover a clean-cut, logical development either in Dryden's critical methods or in his formal literary creed. In 1665, when he wrote the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, he seems to have been master of all the critical tools which he was to use during his long and active career. He never formally adopted and defended the doctrines of any critical school. The periods in his critical evolution which I have attempted to define are, at least in chief part, the results of his adaptation to changing conditions. But these changing conditions did not impose upon him a profession of faith in abstract principles. Each new environment called for defense of, or opposition to, certain literary men or literary types; and though the development of critical theory is of the utmost importance to the student of esthetics, it made little difference to Dryden, or to those whom he tried to please, just how he went about his task. Therefore it is his literary allegiances, rather than his literary methods or theories, which divide our author's criticism into periods.

In stating that abstract theories did not furnish the points of departure for Dryden's critical development I do not wish to imply that the periods of this development are

formally indistinguishable. With our author's changing environment and the consequent variation in his literary motives and purposes there naturally went alterations in spirit more or less clearly mirrored in his formal critical theory. Before attempting formally to characterize Dryden's critical periods it will be necessary to make a classification of critical methods. The history of criticism may be roughly represented as a long conflict between two parties: on the one side are those who insist on understanding what they enjoy, or, as it has often worked out in practice, enjoying only what they understand; on the other are those who allow full play to their instinctive feelings, either making no inquiry for systematic explanations, or, when these are given, attempting to bend them to the task of justifying the pleasurable emotion already experienced. These parties represent two opposite types of mind—the rationalistic and the romantic.

In Dryden's time the rationalists were, as has been remarked above, of two sorts: on the one hand were those of the French school, usually called neoclassicists, rationalizing literature by creating it in accordance with logical principles; on the other were the representatives of the English school achieving much the same result by holding literature down to the good-sense standards of ordinary life.¹ The real romanticist, of course, has no critical method; absence of method is the very essence of his way of looking at art. When he begins to account for the charm of romantic literature, as did the critics of the nineteenth century, he develops in the direction of a larger rationalism. A really romantic critic, in the sense in which I am using the term, is not merely one who defends romantic literature—the most cold-blooded modern rationalist can do that—but one who defends

¹ Cf. *ante*, p. 117, note.

it, as Matthew Arnold so often did, by an immediate appeal to the emotions.

Looking back on the long struggle between romanticism and rationalism, we usually give our sympathy to the former, while we visit with something like scorn the dogmatic blindness of the latter. And it must be confessed that, judged by the standards of our taste, the rationalist of the past has usually been in the wrong: he has habitually supposed his analysis complete when, perhaps, the very heart of the matter has escaped him. But although the rationalist of outlived periods loses nearly all the cases which he pleads before the jury of modern opinion, it is true, nevertheless, that in one sense the history of criticism exhibits him in the character of victor. His analyses have never been complete; he has never been able, either to justify the literature which instinct has recognized as great or to outline a successful theory for the production of such literature. But, from age to age, his critical scheme of things has widened tremendously. The very attacks of the romanticists have forced upon him doctrines which have permitted the formal recognition of the romantic types of literature. The majority of modern critics, pouring out the vials of their wrath upon seventeenth century rationalists, are merely later rationalists with a widened scheme of esthetic theory.

It is true that during the seventeenth century the rationalistic creed seemed to be narrowing itself down, crystalizing itself. Just at this time, nevertheless, men like Dryden, largely romantic in their temperament, were attempting to force upon it the historical manner of looking at literature.¹ In one sense the historical method combines, and mediates between, rationalism and romanticism:

¹ Cf. p. 74, note 2.

it attempts, by historical analysis, to explain all types and view-points. But in another sense it is merely a rationalism made broad enough to include everything else ; its attempt is always to make intelligible the creation and character of works of art.

In attempting to give formal characterization to the periods of Dryden's critical development we should bear in mind these four methods of criticism, with the definitions which have been given to them : the romantic, the French rationalistic, or neoclassic, the English rationalistic, and the historical. One should also remember that Dryden's transitions were not conscious and formal, that he was always bent on vindicating his man, his poem, his type of literature, never on exhibiting a method of criticism. With the reservations which these statements imply the following generalizations are approximately accurate. During his first period Dryden used practically all four of the methods which have been defined above ; but the period is given its prevailing character by the fact that the English rationalistic way of looking at literature played a decidedly subordinate part, and that the romantic method stood out prominently above the others. The second period was characterized by a kind of pseudo-neo-classicism—a classicism stretched and perverted into a defense of the English heroic play. It was in the third period that the romantic method came to its own : this is the only stage in the evolution of Dryden's theory at which the rationalistic spirit approached the vanishing point. The fourth period belonged entirely to the rationalistic mood ; and, though the distinction is sometimes difficult to make, it seems to me that it was English rationalism, rather than French, which dominated during this time. The fifth period resembles, in a limited sense, the first : in both of them we have all of Dryden's methods and theories side by side. The difference between the two lies in the fact that whereas in the first

period all of these methods and theories flourished simultaneously without any attempt, on Dryden's part, at a logical coördination, during the last, our author, with the spirit of the rationalist still strong upon him, toned them all down and attempted to bring them into harmony. Nevertheless the last period was marked, especially toward the end, by a decided dominance of the romantic manner. The historical method was not especially characteristic of any period: it was conspicuous at all the stages of Dryden's development except the fourth, the rationalistic stage.

WM. E. BOHN.

